

KIDS' CONSUMPTION: HOW CHILDREN PERCEIVE
THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ADVERTISEMENTS AND PRODUCTS

By

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To Neil and Laura Jane

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Multiple perspectives and methods are used to investigate the relationships children (ages 7-11 years) perceive between advertisements and their consumption experiences. While advertising's effects on children have been studied extensively, rarely have researchers considered the broader context in which products are also purchased and consumed. Products and their use are a focal point of consumer behavior and the most readily available source of marketplace information to young consumers. Combining both experimentation and depth interviews, this research examines whether advertising influences children's interpretations of their product experiences. The hybrid research design incorporates the precision and rigor of a causal analysis as well as the rich insights of interpretive approaches. Three studies were conducted: a preliminary phenomenological investigation, an experimental study of the interaction between

advertising and product trial and an in-depth qualitative investigation that replicates the basic experimental framework. The experiment examines the relationships among children's affective reactions to ads, brand perceptions and attitudes within a consumption context. The qualitative studies focus on the advertising-consumption relationship from the child's perspective. Drawing from grounded theory, this research reflects the view that understanding of human phenomena must be grounded in the reality of events and situations as they are subjectively experienced.

The preliminary study revealed that children focus extensively on the entertainment value of commercial messages, sometimes at the expense of the brand appeal. The centrality of executional dimensions in children's interpretations of advertising was most evident among the older age group (10 to 11-year olds). The experimental results were consistent with emergent patterns, indicating that advertising does have the capacity to frame a child's consumption experience, though age-related differences were observed. It was the older children who allowed their affective reactions to advertisements to color their perceptions of usage experience. Reinforcing the findings of the first two studies, the in-depth qualitative study revealed two distinct perspectives on advertising-consumption relations. Younger children tended to view advertisements from a more functional perspective, focusing primarily on the brand. The older children seemed to approach advertising from the perspective of an art critic, drawing extensively on advertising's creative properties and design.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a pervasive factor in the lives of most American children. Within the last decade manufacturers have dramatically stepped up their efforts to reach children through new advertising media, sophisticated production techniques and creative appeals. Television commercials, movies, video games and specialty magazines all carry a vast and exciting array of persuasive messages targeted at a young audience (Pereira 1990). Television is a particularly accessible and effective medium for reaching children. For many, time spent in front of the television may equal or even exceed the number of hours spent in school each week. Recent estimates suggest that children between the ages of 6 and 11 watch about 25 hours of television per week and are exposed to as many as 20,000-25,000 commercials in a single year (Raju and Lonial 1990; Weisskoff 1985).

Concerns about children's ability to fully comprehend and evaluate advertised messages has stimulated substantial research and heated debate among scholars and practitioners since the early 1970s. The controversy surrounding children's responses to advertising has absorbed the attention of researchers from a number of academic disciplines and political orientations. Critics assert that advertising to children is inherently unfair because children lack the cognitive skills and life experiences needed to resist persuasive product claims. Supporters argue, on the other hand, that children's vulnerabilities are often overstated and that by providing product information, advertising helps both parents and children make more informed choices.

Though the controversy continues, research evidence does suggest that children may alter their preferences and behavior as a consequence of advertising exposure. There is little doubt that children, especially young children, are drawn to the exciting array of products manufacturers offer them. In attempting to understand the precise nature of this influence, researchers have addressed a number of issues of both applied and theoretical interest over the years. A substantial literature has accumulated (see Adler et al. 1980; McNeal 1987; Raju and Lonial 1990 for reviews). A bibliography published over a decade ago listed approximately 500 entries, of which over 200 were research studies assessing the impact of advertising on children's consumer activities (Meringoff 1980). Though research activity slowed during the deregulatory era of the 1980s, a small group of researchers has continued to raise important theoretical and methodological issues.

Of fundamental interest to both researchers and practitioners alike is understanding the specific nature of advertising's influence on children's attitudes and behavior. The relative effectiveness of specific techniques or strategies used in advertisements targeted at children has been examined across a variety of contexts and with children of varying developmental skills or abilities. This is a research area that subsumes a wide variety of substantive issues and methodological concerns. Questions such as (1) do children desire the products they see advertised? (2) are they motivated to ask their parents for them? and, (3) are they more likely to choose products they have seen advertised than others? have guided a number of research studies over the last 20

years. Common to these investigations is the focus on advertising's role in the product acquisition process.

In general terms, there can be little doubt that children attend to ads, try to understand them and are often attracted to the products they see depicted. Not surprisingly, clear age-related patterns have been detected in terms of children's belief in or acceptance of advertised claims. Relative to their younger counterparts, older children (10-13) tend to be much more skeptical of advertising (Bever, Smith, Bengen and Johnson 1975; Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Rossiter 1977; Ward, Wackman and Wartella 1977). They readily acknowledge that advertising does not always tell the truth and are more likely to express negative feelings toward the institution of advertising (Blatt, Spencer and Ward 1972; Bever et al. 1975; Robertson and Rossiter 1974). However, these kinds of generalized indicators may overstate children's actual rejection of specific advertisements and persuasive claims (Atkin 1980; Gorn and Goldberg 1977; Rossiter 1979). Even a broad knowledge base and a generalized skepticism do not insure immunity from well-crafted advertisements. Though as adults we recognize advertising's persuasive character, we are still drawn to certain products through commercial messages that touch our hearts and minds. Children are no different; when asked, they may express a more adult-like view of advertising that bears little relationship to advertising's actual influence on their responses to specific products or commercial messages. Though younger children tend to be affected more strongly by advertising, older children who presumably have the ability to discount an advertiser's message may not do so spontaneously (Brucks, Armstrong and Goldberg 1988).

What emerges from the research literature is a view of children and their responses to advertising that is seemingly contradictory. Though it is clear that by the time children reach the age of 9 or 10 they are well aware of advertising's purpose and are likely to express rather skeptical views of advertising, they may still be persuaded to want products that are made to look intriguing, useful or fun. When given the opportunity, they tend to choose advertised products over others and are not beyond asking their parents for them on occasion. How children interpret or evaluate their experiences once they actually obtain the products they have seen advertised is not at all clear.

The Primacy of Product Consumption

Products are a primary focal point of consumer behavior, yet the impact of their use on children's consumer learning has been virtually ignored. The most readily available sources of marketplace information to children are the products they encounter and their own consumption experiences. Consider how many opportunities children have each day to observe the use of products by members of their family. However, even very young children are not simply bystanders. Children learn a wealth of information through their own product experiences. The taste, appearance, function and performance of a product provide a great deal of information to a child who is learning what it means to be a consumer in our society. Through consumption, children learn what products are good and bad, whether advertising claims are truthful, what brands they prefer, and even that products convey meanings apart from their functional properties. Children

develop evaluative criteria based on their product experiences and learn to compare products to one another and to the advertisements that promote them.

While there is compelling evidence that a well-crafted advertisement can persuade children that a product is desirable, we know little about how or when these perceptions are altered once the product leaves the retailer's shelf. Given that a goal of advertising is to stimulate not only an initial purchase but also repeat purchase behavior, the need to understand the impact of consumption on children's product perceptions and attitudes seems obvious. From the child's perspective, it is the benefits provided by a product that are focal. The pleasure, disappointment, understanding and confusion that result from product experiences are the basis for more enduring beliefs and attitudes about the marketplace and its operation. How children perceive and evaluate the relationships between advertising claims and their consumption experiences is an issue that touches on the interests of marketers as well as public policymakers.

Concerns about advertising's capacity to foster unrealistic expectations of products has long been an issue among consumer protectionists as well as the industry representatives charged with regulating children's advertising. Both the Children's Advertising Unit and the National Association of Broadcasters include specific provisions in their guidelines discouraging the use of portrayals that might explicitly or implicitly foster unreasonable expectations of product quality or performance (Children's Advertising Review Unit 1983; National Association of Broadcasters 1977). Clearly, these codes are based on the assumption that at least young children have difficulty recognizing and discounting exaggeration in the context of persuasive messages. To what

extent advertising actually engenders exaggerated expectations that are subsequently disappointed is unknown. Neither have researchers investigated situations where children's product experiences actually exceed their expectations.

Though the dynamics of the advertising-consumption relationship have not been examined empirically, researchers nevertheless have assumed that this relationship has a significant impact on children's perceptions and responsiveness to persuasive attempts. For example, it has been suggested that until children actually experience discrepancies between products as advertised and as consumed, they are unable to fully comprehend advertising's persuasive intent (Robertson and Rossiter 1974). Increased distrust or skepticism of advertising has also been linked to children's negative experiences with heavily promoted products (Ward 1972). Critics of advertising have suggested that commercials may present information that differs from the child's actual experiences with those products, causing confusion and potentially undermining his(her) trust in external sources of information (e.g., Feldman and Wolf 1974). Collectively, these arguments suggest that how children interpret and evaluate the relationship between advertising and their product experiences is important not only in the context of a single purchase decision but also in a much larger or long-term sense. Children's general attitudes about advertising, as well as their perceptions of how the marketplace functions, may be influenced by the many experiences they have had, both good and bad, with heavily advertised products.

Within the research literature on adult consumer behavior, there is a growing consensus that advertising's effects are felt not only at the time of exposure but

subsequently when the consumer comes into contact with a product. What a consumer discovers through product consumption is not a mere reflection of objective reality but an interpretation that may be influenced by the images and language of advertising (Deighton 1984; Hoch and Deighton 1989; Hoch and Ha 1986; Puto and Wells 1984; Wells 1986). Many everyday consumption experiences are open to multiple interpretations. From the clothes we wear to the food we eat, product use is laden with meaning that accrues from sources beyond its structural features or form (McCracken 1986). Even the simple act of eating a bowl of cereal may be subject to diverse interpretations. The experience is sufficiently bland and potentially uninformative enough to support a variety of assertions gleaned from other sources, such as advertising (Deighton 1984). In these kinds of situations, advertisements have the potential to alter the experience by suggesting what features should be noticed and remembered. They may provide clues that consumers use to understand their feelings and reactions. Advertisements seem to have the greatest capacity to reach into the product experience when they are plausible and attractive, yet difficult to dispute directly. Well-executed advertisements use striking images and language to enlarge a product's meaning and value. Advertising claims are frequently more affective than factually based. This is particularly true in the realm of children's advertising where fun, excitement and adventure are overriding themes (Barcus 1980). How these kinds of advertisements may influence children's interpretations of their product experiences is unknown. Researchers interested in the interaction of advertising and evidence have confined their efforts to understanding adult responses and processing strategies.

The Nature of Children's Advertising

To fully understand how children perceive the relationship between the products they consume and the commercial messages that promote them requires an appreciation for the special character of children's advertising and its potential to affect the interpretation of product experiences. Advertisements targeted at children are frequently as enchanting and captivating as the programs in which they are embedded. These ads use special effects, sophisticated animation, and humor to entertain and pique children's interest. Creative visuals depict action and events in a striking and memorable way. Children's ads are rarely informational in the sense of rational appeals based on product features (Barcus 1980). Objective product information emphasizing product ingredients or materials, economic value, or design quality is rarely included in these advertisements. Instead, persuasive appeals tend to focus on the hedonic aspects of consumption. Merriment and fun are the dominant themes across product categories and stylistic conventions. Fantasy is often used to convey excitement and adventure. Animated figures interacting with real children, mysterious flights of fantasy, mythical kingdoms, outer-space beings, and magical transformations of objects are widely used to promote children's products.

In recent years, program-length commercials, host-selling and other techniques using program characters to promote products have emerged in response to a 1984 Federal Communications Commission deregulation order. The promotion of toys and other products associated with program themes and characters has become part of well-coordinated and very successful marketing strategies. In 1990, for example,

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles generated approximately \$400 million in retail sales from the action figures alone (Pereira 1991). This figure does not include additional revenue generated from the sale of licensed products such as turtle cereal, fruit juice, pajamas, sheets, t-shirts, books and videotapes. The television program is a vehicle to provide additional product exposure to the child audience, in the hope of stimulating additional sales that in turn may help to sustain program popularity. Though the marketing of products linked to television themes and characters is nothing new, the line between commercial and program content has become increasingly blurred. Persuasive messages are in some sense becoming more subtle, as programming, advertisements and the products themselves flow into and reinforce one another.

Children's advertisements have become more elaborate, sophisticated and penetrating in recent years. Advertisers rely extensively on the power of captivating visuals and subjective claims to touch the hearts and minds of young consumers. It is in the context of these kinds of persuasive messages that children must somehow interpret and evaluate their product experiences.

How children relate what they see and hear in these advertisements to their subsequent product experiences is not well-understood. Without the benefit of substantial marketplace experience and mature processing strategies to guide them, children somehow manage to make sense of the enticing array of persuasive messages and products that permeate their everyday lives.

To understand how children interpret and evaluate these relationships requires a sensitivity not only to children's cognitive skills and limitations but also to their unique

perspective on advertising and its place within their lives. Research strategies are needed that reliably and accurately reflect children's particular needs and perspectives. In many studies of children's media reception, adult responses or explanations have served as the expressed or implied standard for performance (Anderson 1981; Dorr 1986). Researchers have taken their own interpretations of televised content as the standard and evaluated children's responses against that adult baseline. With this criterion, children's understandings implicitly represent some sort of flawed approximation to the interpretation an adult might provide, rather than a unique and valid perspective on the world. To understand how children perceive the advertising-consumption relationship will require a sensitivity to the concepts and categories children use to define their experiences.

The general paradigm that has been adopted by researchers to understand the linkages between advertising and consumption incorporates key assumptions about consumers that may not accurately reflect how children respond to persuasive messages. Within this framework consumers are depicted as more or less logical thinkers who (1) search out and manipulate information in order to make choices among goods and services; (2) respond to advertising as a partisan source; and (3) treat advertising claims as provisional hypotheses that are subsequently used to evaluate product experiences. Each of these assumptions has a direct bearing on the way the advertising-consumption relationship is conceptualized and measured. Violation of these assumptions may suggest that alternative approaches are needed to understand children's unique and often surprising responses. The model of adult processing that has developed provides both

important insight into the advertising-consumption relationship and a useful counterpoint from which to understand children's reactions.

Current models of the advertising-consumption relationship assume that consumers approach advertising with a certain amount of skepticism. The performance expectations adults form as a consequence of advertising exposure are rather tentative because they respond to advertisements as partisan sources of information. Adults both recognize and act on the knowledge that advertising is inherently biased. Product claims are treated merely as conjectures that may or may not prove to be accurate.

While this presumption of skepticism clearly holds for most adults, children are much more likely to believe what they see in advertisements. Children enjoy commercials and are often attracted to the products they see portrayed. Even as they begin to acknowledge advertisers' motives, children may not spontaneously apply what they know while viewing (Brucks et al. 1988). Without a reminder to critically evaluate the contents of a message while viewing, children tend to focus their energies on the product and the captivating way it is portrayed. Though children become increasingly skeptical of advertising during middle childhood, this skepticism is relatively fragile. They may express rather negative attitudes about TV advertising that bear little relationship to an advertisement's actual influence on their attitudes or purchase inclinations (Rossiter 1979). Difficulties may arise because children do not fully understand how or why advertising works. Familiarity with the range of influence strategies used by advertisers allows adults to take a more detached view of what they see and hear. Children lack this experience and the critical eye it engenders. As a

result, they are more easily persuaded by advertising techniques that are readily discounted by more experienced consumers. Without this knowledge to guide them, children may find it more difficult to differentiate obviously true and obviously false claims from those of a more intermediate or uncertain nature.

Emerging from the research literature is a view of the school age child who is quite capable of discounting an advertiser's message but may not always be inclined to do so. Though this may be troubling from a policy perspective, it is neither illogical nor particularly surprising. Advertisements offer children an exciting and dazzling array of product alternatives. Without economic responsibility or concern, children are free to enjoy what they see before them. From the child's perspective, each new toy, cereal or snack represents a fresh opportunity for pleasure or amusement. Advertisers tout these benefits with humor and a singular charm. Without specific instructions or reminders to discount what the advertiser has to say, children may be more inclined to simply sit back and enjoy the special effects and flights of fantasy they see before them.

Concerns about children's ability and inclination to differentiate among ad claims and discount them appropriately are critically important issues in terms of children's advertising response. Children's greater proclivity to accept advertising claims may have important implications for how consumption experiences are judged or evaluated. What may be regarded as mere supposition by an adult may take on the trappings of fact through the eyes of a young and inexperienced consumer. Under these circumstances, consumption experiences may be shaped by attractive yet vague promises of performance. The key to understanding children's responses to products and the

advertisements that promote them rests with the children themselves. Rather than mapping their responses onto adult models, it is important to look at these relationships in terms of the structure and units children perceive. There is much to be learned by allowing children to tell their side of the story, through their own language and point of view. Clearly, there is a need for research into the nature of children's expectations and how they are brought into play in the context of consumption experiences. To be useful, such research requires a sensitivity to the child's unique perspective of advertising and how it works. Multiple research approaches are needed to learn about the advertising-consumption relationship and its implications for children and their understanding of the marketplace.

Research Purpose and Direction

The general paradigm that has been adopted by consumer researchers to understand the linkages between advertising and consumption is firmly grounded within the information processing framework. Of fundamental interest within this perspective are the cognitive mechanisms that may be used to explain how consumers assimilate and utilize information. Developmental researchers have adopted a similar theoretical and methodological orientation to the study of advertising response. Though very little is known about the role of consumption, the information processing perspective has provided a number of insights into children's ability to select, manipulate and retrieve information conveyed through advertising (e.g., Brucks et al. 1988; Costley and Brucks 1987; Roedder 1981; Roedder, Sternthal and Calder 1983; Wartella et al. 1979). Without an appreciation for and sensitivity to these cognitive mechanisms, our

understanding of children's responses would certainly be limited. However, cognitive explanations alone are not able to capture the range and complexity of children's reactions to advertisements and products.

The broad purpose of this research project is to learn more about how children perceive the relationships between the advertisements they see and the products they consume. To understand fully how advertising affects children requires greater insight into how the consumption experience is assessed and managed. Children's advertising responses are embedded within a larger system in which products are also purchased and consumed. It is through trial and experience that children have the opportunity to test the validity and relevance of what an advertiser has said. Studying children's reactions to advertising within the context of this larger embedding system brings to light unanticipated factors and relationships. Consumer researchers with both theoretical and substantive interests have stressed the importance of trying to identify key contextual factors and their operation within larger embedding systems (Lutz 1991; Lynch 1982, 1983). Needed are research approaches that have the capacity to address advertising response issues within this broader context.

To begin to address these needs, this research project incorporates both experimental methods and more discovery-oriented depth interviews to understand the substantive issues that define children's perceptions of the relationships between advertising and their consumption experiences. Over the course of eighteen months and interviews with approximately 160 children between the ages of 7 and 11, three studies, designed to complement and enrich one another, were conducted.

The first study was a qualitative investigation with both substantive and methodological aims. This portion of the project was designed to develop a preliminary understanding of how children perceive and evaluate ad-product interrelationships and to assess the viability of an inductive approach with elementary school children. The depth and breadth of children's responses quickly put to rest any doubts about children's ability or willingness to participate in the research in a meaningful way. Findings from the preliminary study served as input to the conceptual development and design of an experimental investigation as well as a source of hypotheses for subsequent qualitative inquiry.

The second study extends children's advertising research by looking beyond prepurchase activities to product use or consumption. Using advertisements specifically intended for children and broadcast within the context of children's programming, the experiment examines the interaction of advertising and evidence. At a micro-theoretical level, the experiment addresses whether and how advertisements may influence children's cognitive and affective responses in the context of product consumption. The relationships among a number of variables previously neglected in the children's research literature were examined, including attitude toward the advertisement, entertainment, brand perceptions and attitudes. Though the experimental design allowed for the testing of key conceptual relationships, it was not particularly well suited for discovering new or unanticipated phenomena or relationships of significance. The discovery-oriented design of the preliminary study had shown that there was much to be learned by simply allowing the children "to talk." This approach enables the researcher "to learn more; be

surprised; to find out what one does not already expect, predict or hypothesize" (Mahrer 1988, p. 697). It is particularly well suited not only for approaching new topics but to gain fresh slants on phenomena about which a great deal is already known, such as children's responses to advertising.

Utilizing grounded theory perspectives and analytic strategies, the third study represented a return to the field for a more in-depth qualitative examination of the ideas and hypotheses that had been suggested earlier. The third study was designed to learn more about how children think about advertisements and products in the context of their everyday lives. Depth interviews were used to learn about children's systems of meaning rather than those imposed by the adult world. Discovery-oriented in nature, the grounded theory approach attempts to understand the world from the perspective of the individual who lives, feels or experiences it. Rather than entering the field with ready-made categories or interpretive schemes, the grounded theorist attempts to gather rich descriptions that reflect the perspectives and experiences of the interviewees. By obtaining extensive descriptions of specific events or situations the researcher acquires material of sufficient depth and detail to construct a grounded theory, which is inductively derived from the substantive phenomenon it represents (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967).

Though interpretive modes of inquiry have gained increased acceptance among consumer researchers, these approaches have not been applied to children's research issues. Why this is the case is not entirely clear. Perhaps, it is due in part to the oft cited concern that young children do not have the ability to answer questions accurately

because of memory and perceptual deficits. Young children, in particular, are viewed as inaccurate and unreliable observers of their own consumption-related activities (Goldberg and Gorn 1983; Peracchio 1990). As any parent or teacher will attest, older children (7 to 12-year olds) are much better able to express their opinions, concerns and feelings directly and without hesitation. It is interesting to note that some of the earliest and still most widely cited studies within the children's advertising literature relied on interviews to understand children's responses (e.g., Bever et al. 1975; Blatt et al. 1972; Ward 1972; Ward et al. 1977). Though not phenomenological in orientation, these studies provided initial insight into the ways children think about and relate to advertising and other marketing stimuli. As research on children's advertising responses matured, this type of approach was criticized for its exploratory character and largely abandoned. In the ensuing years, a great deal has been learned about children's cognitive structures and processes but very little about their consumption related experiences and perceptions.

The potential benefits of utilizing a grounded theory approach to understand children's experiences as consumers are numerous. First, very little is known about how children think about the relationships between the advertisements they see and the products they obtain. Open-ended interviews are a useful tool for learning about how children perceive these relationships, unfettered by adult biases and perspectives. It is tempting yet misleading to view children as miniature adults who simply lack the cognitive skills or sophistication needed to be effective decision makers. Among social scientists and practitioners there is mounting criticism of research practices that fail to adequately represent and reflect children's beliefs and practices (e.g., Goode 1986;

Rojcewicz 1987; Waksler 1986). Discovery-based research methods offer the opportunity to strip away "adultcentric" interpretations of children's consumer activities. Rather than translating children's experiences into adult categories or commonsense views of the world, this approach attempts to understand the child's experience as it is. Discovery-oriented research recognizes that children's consciousness differs from adults' but views this as a positive phenomenon to be understood and respected. The child's realm is depicted as natural, everyday or phenomenal rather than scientific or theoretical.

The qualitative investigation offers the opportunity to view the advertising-consumption relationship through the eyes of a child. In combination with more traditional experimental methods, a great deal can be learned about how children evaluate what they consume. A hybrid research design brings to bear the strengths of multiple approaches and perspectives (Lutz 1991). The potential contributions of such a study are both substantive and methodological. From a substantive perspective, very little is known about product use, though it is a critical element of the consumption cycle. The investigation is designed to provide specific knowledge about how children perceive and evaluate the relationship between the advertisements they see and the products they consume. The ways in which advertisements may potentially alter children's product experiences has important consequences both in an immediate sense and in terms of advertising's broader impact on children and their understanding of the marketplace. Methodologically, the investigation represents one of the first attempts within the consumer literature to approach issues affecting children from a phenomenological perspective. This approach offers the opportunity to question assumptions made about

children's perceptions of the advertising-consumption relationship that have implicitly guided prior thinking and analysis. By combining experimental and phenomenological methods within a single research project, this investigation has the capacity to capitalize on the strengths and merits of both. What emerges is a richer and more detailed understanding of a significant yet little understood facet of children's consumer experience.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Few consumer issues in recent memory have stimulated as spirited and protracted a dialogue as the question of how advertising affects children. Educators, academic researchers, regulatory agencies, public policymakers, public interest groups, broadcasters and advertisers and their ad agencies have all contributed to the complex and often fiery debate about the impact of advertising in children's lives. Issues of social and regulatory policy are at the heart of this controversy (Huston, Watkins and Kunkel 1989). Though virtually all interested parties agree that children constitute a special audience with distinct needs and vulnerabilities, there is substantial disagreement regarding issues of fairness in advertising to children and its broader impact on the socialization process (Armstrong and Brucks 1988; Kinsey 1987; Kline 1989; Liebert and Sprafkin 1988).

During the last twenty years, Americans have witnessed the rise and fall of the Federal Trade Commission's proposal to ban children's television advertising, the advent of program-length commercials, substantial fluctuation in the number of commercial minutes the Federal Communications Commission allows during children's programming and the latest innovation, Channel One (Condry, Bence and Scheibe 1987; Federal Trade Commission 1978; Greenberg and Brand 1993; Kunkel 1988a, 1988b, 1991; Kunkel and Watkins 1987; Mueller and Wulfemeyer 1992). It is within this social and political context that research questions have been framed, methods chosen and knowledge

accumulated. The nature and depth of our scientific insight into how children respond to advertising is derived from the research agenda that has been shaped in some measure by this broader social context.

Concerns about children's ability to comprehend advertising's persuasive character, evaluate specific techniques and strategies, and make appropriate product choices have motivated the majority of research efforts since the early 1970s. To address these issues, developmental-stage and information processing models have been utilized to understand how children's cognitive skills in dealing with advertised information evolve with age and accumulated experience. Without question, this research focus is both important and necessary on social policy as well as economic grounds. However, it is also important to recognize that it represents but a single perspective.

Fundamental concerns about children's ability to cope with advertised messages have led to a rather narrowly defined research agenda. Researchers have tended to focus on matters of public policy, to the exclusion of other issues and modes of thinking that may be useful in furthering our understanding of children's responsiveness to marketplace stimuli. Other potentially interesting questions about advertising and its role within children's lives have simply not been posed because they lie outside our traditional construal of the aims and methods of children's advertising research. At a very fundamental level, a research agenda is a function of the social and political context that produces it. A *Zeitgeist* prevails within a research community that tends to constrain how issues are conceptualized and investigated. This is particularly true in the case of

children's advertising, where at issue are deep concerns about fairness and cultural values, as well as appropriate business practice.

Guiding this research project from its inception is the notion that while a great deal has been learned about children's advertising response over the years, the prevailing paradigm is limited in its ability to capture the full range of issues that define advertising's meaning and purpose in children's lives. Without doubt, tremendous insight into the development of children's cognitive skills and their deployment during ad processing has been gained. However, prevailing modes of thinking have the capacity to capture only the outlines of a more complex and multihued picture. Kuhn (1962) suggests that a research paradigm, however specialized, incorporates theory, application and instrumentation that are accepted and adhered to by members of a scientific community. Paradigmatic assumptions guide conceptualization, research design and analysis. Indicating the maturing of a scientific discipline, paradigm-based research offers the advantages of increased precision, specification and rigor. Basic premises and fundamental relationships are established, thus allowing for detailed investigation. However, paradigmatic research or "normal science" is limited in discovering radically new phenomena.

An explicit and fundamental assumption of this research project is that broader, more discovery-oriented perspectives that look beyond information processing and policy-driven concerns are needed, to begin to capture the rich color and essence of advertising's meaning in children's lives. What appear to be basic, substantive questions about how children make sense of, interpret and use ads have not been asked because

they lie outside traditional modes of thinking and communication among researchers. With the caveat firmly in mind that a single research project can only begin to demonstrate the value of a broadened conceptualization, this investigation focuses on perceived relationships between advertisements and product consumption. The approach taken represents a departure from traditional models on three levels. First, it looks beyond prepurchase issues. It is grounded upon the simple assumption that neither the decision process nor children's attempt to construct product meaning end at the point of purchase. Children's product-related thoughts and perceptions derive as much from their direct experiences with consumption objects as from the advertisements designed to promote them. To neglect this very powerful source of marketplace information represents a tremendous oversight. From a child's perspective, it is the product and the fun, excitement or disappointment it offers that ultimately matters. Second, a meaning-based model of advertising is utilized to guide the research process (McCracken 1987). This perspective explicitly recognizes that advertising is a reflection of the culture that creates its form and content. An advertisement is not a fixed or neutral object but a kaleidoscopic, cultural product containing different layers of meaning, ranging from the obvious to the culturally interpreted. When children respond to advertising or other types of marketplace stimuli, they are responding to products of a particular era and social context (Kline 1989; Watkins 1985). Thoughts and feelings are generated according to their emerging understanding of cultural conventions, beliefs and values. The child is not simply extracting product information from an advertisement that (s)he then stores in memory for use in subsequent decisions, but is an active participant in the

construction and communication of cultural meanings. Fully occupied in the process of learning and negotiating their notions of self and community, children may use advertisements as a window on the larger culture. To the child engaged in the process of discovering what it means to be a child and a consumer, advertisements are more than simply product information. They are rich sources of cultural knowledge and insight. This perspective departs from the prevailing paradigm by viewing the child not just as a passive recipient of information but as an active participant in the construction of meaning. Children construct and shape meanings that are multifaceted, intriguing and often complex yet may bear little relationship to adult interpretations. This research project departs from traditional approaches by explicitly focusing on the child's unique perspective on the advertising-consumption relationship. Though children's responses legitimately reflect the situations and objects that they confront in daily life, relatively little is known about their unique perspective. In many studies of children's media reception, adult responses are used as the asserted or implied standard of performance (Anderson 1981; Anderson and Avery 1988; Bever et al. 1975; Dorr 1986; Rossiter and Robertson 1974). Researchers have utilized their own interpretations of televised content as the standard and evaluated children's responses against it. With this criterion, children's perceptions are implicitly regarded as some sort of flawed approximation to the adult model, rather than a true and valuable perspective on the world. This research is based on the assumption that children's reactions to the situations and objects they confront in daily life are far more complex than theory often gives them credit (Denzin 1977). Until this complexity is recognized and incorporated into empirical studies of

children's consumer behavior, our images of consumer socialization will remain incomplete.

The Persuasive Influence of Advertising

The investigation of advertising's effects on children has a relatively long and rich tradition within consumer research. After over 20 years of research, the empirical evidence distinctly shows that advertising influences young children's product awareness, preferences and behavior. It is clear that children pay attention to ads, delight in the flights of fantasy and fun they depict and are often attracted to the products they promote. Of fundamental interest to researchers and marketing practitioners alike is understanding the precise nature of this influence and the processes by which it occurs. This is a research area that incorporates an array of specific substantive and theoretical issues. Much of the research on children's responses to advertising can be cast in terms of four major areas. These are (1) children's attention to advertising, (2) children's comprehension of commercial messages, (3) advertising's persuasive impact on children's product preferences and (4) the behavioral consequences of exposure, particularly on choice and requests for advertised products (see Atkin 1980; McNeal 1987, Raju and Lonial 1990, and Wartella 1980 for alternative classification schemes). Within this broad categorization fall a number of studies that have been designed to test the relative effectiveness of specific techniques or strategies used in advertisements targeted at children. For example, the persuasive impact of product characters, premium offers, disclaimers and the type of claims made have all been the subject of extensive research study (e.g., Adler et al. 1980). Of primary interest here is the research that focuses

more generally on advertising's impact on the attitudes and behavior of school-age (5 to 12-year-old) children. This work provides the foundation necessary to begin to consider how advertising might influence children's interpretations and evaluations within the broader context of product consumption.

Research on children's beliefs in or acceptance of advertising has been focused at two levels (1) their willingness to accept specific claims made about products and (2) their more general attitudes about the truthfulness of advertising. As might be expected, clear age-related patterns emerge. Older children (10 to 13-year-olds), tend to be much more skeptical of advertising than their younger counterparts (Bever et al. 1975; Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Rossiter 1977; Ward et al. 1977). They are quick to concede that advertising does not always tell the truth and frequently express rather negative attitudes toward the institution of advertising itself (Blatt et al. 1972; Bever et al. 1975; Robertson and Rossiter 1974).

Underpinning research effort in this area is the question of when children understand advertising's persuasive intent and profit motive. Long-standing concern about young children's failure to recognize the persuasive purpose that is intrinsic to commercial advertising led to a number of research investigations during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g., Blosser and Roberts 1985; Donohue, Henke and Donohue 1980; Macklin 1985, 1987; Roberts 1982; Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Ward et al. 1977). Though the age at which children fully comprehend advertising's purpose has not been established with certainty, there is substantial evidence indicating that by 7 or 8 years-old, most children have at least a preliminary understanding (Roberts 1982; Robertson and Rossiter

1974; Ward et al. 1977; Wartella and Hunter 1983). The recognition of persuasive intent is considered a basic developmental milestone by both researchers and policymakers. Traditionally, it has been assumed that once children understand the persuasive purpose of advertising they become more skeptical and are then capable of resisting its appeal (Brucks, Armstrong and Goldberg 1988; Federal Trade Commission 1978; Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Rossiter and Robertson 1974). Without the recognition that advertising intends to persuade, children are presumed to accept advertising claims as truthful rather than question them as adults often do. Young children are believed to be in need of protection due to their inability to detect persuasive intent in advertising, making them especially vulnerable to its appeals. Older children, on the other hand, equipped with an understanding of commercial intent, begin to mistrust advertising and arm themselves with "cognitive defenses" to resist its persuasive aims (Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Rossiter and Robertson 1974). They are presumed to have less need for protection as a consequence of their ability to comprehend advertising's persuasive function and erect appropriate defenses against it.

However, for this enhanced awareness or knowledge of advertising to provide a viable defense against persuasive messages, children must draw upon it while they watch television commercials. Recent research suggests, however, that generalized attitudinal measures may be only weakly related to children's actual rejection of specific advertisements and message claims in a viewing context (Atkin 1980; Goldberg and Gorn 1974; Gorn and Florsheim 1985; Gorn and Goldberg 1977; Rossiter 1979). Knowledge of the intent of advertising is not sufficient. An exciting, funny or compelling

presentation may simply overwhelm any cognitive defenses that a child might bring to bear. So, while older children may utter rather negative views about advertising in general, these opinions may have little to do with their natural reactions while viewing. To make sense of this apparent dilemma, researchers have turned to cognitive developmental concepts and information processing theories. During middle childhood and early adolescence, children gradually develop the ability to direct or control their information processing strategies (Roedder 1981). However, this is a gradual process. In the early stages, children will often be influenced by immediate, engaging product presentations and tend to respond accordingly. Children of this age group (8-12 year-olds), tend not to think critically about advertisements unless explicitly encouraged to do so. They are unlikely to generate counterarguments spontaneously in response to an advertisement, due to their inability to (1) focus attention on message arguments rather than peripheral content and (2) retrieve knowledge relevant to the evaluation of these arguments, without specific cues (Brucks et al. 1988). For the "cued processor", the organized retrieval and use of available information is possible only in the presence of appropriate cues. Unless advertising knowledge is expressly activated, children tend not to rebut advertised claims (Brucks et al. 1988). Of course, adults are also susceptible to the persuasive power of an attractive portrayal. However, there is a critical difference. While adults may choose to suspend their disbelief on occasion, they have the capacity to manage their information processing strategies. For children, however, even once they know that advertising is expressly designed to sell products, advertising

may still affect their established preferences because they lack the ability to control the allocation of their cognitive resources (Roedder, Sternthal and Calder 1983).

This muddle of emerging competencies, skills and perhaps motivations makes this age group a particularly interesting one to study. While they possess appropriate background knowledge to assess advertised claims in a critical fashion, they must be reminded to do so. Though aware of specific ad techniques and seemingly skeptical of its approach, even older children are responsive to ad content, both central and peripheral. While this duality of response can be accounted for in terms of cognitive deficits, it is also important to recognize that this explanation implicitly assumes that children's perceived meaning centers on brand evaluation and assessing the veridicality of ad claims. That children may have a broader agenda in reading advertisements either is not explicitly considered or is deemed irrelevant. Ads are not merely sources of brand information but reflections of a playful world of fantasy, status and cultural norms. By delimiting investigation to a set of researcher-defined response categories, it may be that equally meaningful dimensions are neglected. The notion of counterargumentation is an adult construction as is the a priori specification of peripheral content (e.g., Ross et al. 1981; Rossiter 1979). Unencumbered by the realities of economic obligation and with \$4.7 billion dollars to spend, American children may have little interest in generating counterarguments in response to the fantasy and amusement that commercials offer (Solomon 1992). The presumption that children view a selling motive as inherently negative may simply be inaccurate. It is the assumption that children view commercial aims as somehow duplicitous that underpins adult expectations that children not only

should but will erect defenses against advertised messages once they acquire the capacity to do so. However, it is perfectly reasonable that a child will be fully aware of an advertisement's aim, and interpret it as such, without any negative feeling or connotation. There is no reason why recognition of advertising's persuasive purpose necessitates a decline in a child's responsiveness to specific commercial messages.

Children's awareness of persuasive intent is an important issue not only because of its link to the acquisition of cognitive defenses, but because a child's interpretation of a particular advertisement depends on his(her) understanding of the nature and function of advertising in general. Unlike other forms of mass communications a child encounters, advertising transmits its sales plea through the symbolism of idealized settings and situations. To make sense of these appeals, a child learns that ads use dramatized episodes, characters and emotions to symbolize or represent real situations (Robertson and Rossiter 1974). Before a child can fully grasp the meaning of a commercial, (s)he needs to understand that the primary focus of the message is not information but persuasion. Inherent in the content of the advertisement is a systematic partiality or bias such that those features that enhance persuasion are emphasized and those that impede it are de-emphasized. From this perspective, the key characteristic of an ad is not simply that there is an intent to sell but that, in order to do so, the content of the appeal is crafted in specific ways. If a child is aware of the purpose and form of advertising as communications designed for commercial aims, then the imagery will be interpreted within that broader context. Identifying a message as an advertisement helps the child to draw on knowledge relevant to decoding the specific meanings of text and

images (Pateman 1983). How children bring this knowledge to bear in the context of viewing is not well-understood. It is important to look beyond traditional schemes used to categorize cognitive responses. Though the questions of whether and when children generate counterarguments is critical, these schemes do not adequately capture the depth and complexity of children's response. Until conceptual models are firmly grounded in the reality of children's experiences and perspectives, understanding of advertising's persuasive power is necessarily limited.

Researchers with an interest in advertising's persuasive effects have sought behavioral as well as attitudinal evidence of its influence. Two types of behavioral variables have been the focus of much of this research: the frequency of children's product-related requests and their choice behavior in experimental settings. Correlational measures have been used to assess relationships among a child's age, exposure to advertising and the frequency of product requests to parents. Although the weight of evidence seems to suggest that the frequency of children's product requests diminish with age, the data are somewhat difficult to interpret (Galst and White 1976; Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Robertson and Rossiter 1976; Rossiter 1979; Ward and Wackman 1972). When product class differences are controlled for, the relationship becomes increasingly murky. Not surprisingly, requests for toys decline with age while requests for clothing and bicycles increase (Isler, Popper and Ward 1987; Ward and Wackman 1972). Requests for heavily advertised products, such as snack foods and soda, that are relevant to children of all ages do not appear to decline significantly as a child matures (Ward and Wackman 1972). Collectively, the evidence seems to suggest that the frequency of

children's advertising-induced requests to parents declines slightly with age. When age is controlled for, children who watch more television are more likely to make product requests than children who spend less time viewing (Goldberg 1990; Robertson and Rossiter 1977). It should be noted, however, that these findings are based primarily on global indicators of advertising exposure rather than more difficult to isolate linkages between specific advertisements and subsequent product requests. The impact of advertising exposure on children's product choices has also been investigated in a variety of experimental settings. Under controlled circumstances, a relatively consistent pattern between advertising exposure and product choice emerges. Television commercials can and do persuade children to select the products they see advertised. These results appear to hold across age groups and in both laboratory and field settings (Goldberg, Gorn and Gibson 1978; Gorn and Goldberg 1982; Resnik and Stern 1977). The impact of advertising exposure on choice behavior is apparently not limited to the specific product advertised, but may generalize across product categories. Goldberg et al. (1978) found, for example, that exposure to commercials for highly sugared snacks and cereals led young children (5 to 6-year-olds) to choose these kinds of sugared foods more readily than children who had been exposed to pro-nutritional messages. A similar pattern of findings was observed by Gorn and Goldberg (1982), who observed children's snack choices (5-8 year-olds) over a two-week period. Though these studies have focused on younger children (5-8 year-olds), there is evidence that advertising may influence the choices of older children as well. Roedder, Sternthal and Calder (1983) found that as a consequence of advertising exposure older children (9-13 year-olds) made product

choices that were inconsistent with their pre-existing attitudes, particularly when the choice task was complex. Advertisements seemed to encourage children to select products they saw advertised, instead of products they generally prefer but that were not advertised in the context of the study. Fourth graders (9-10 year-olds), in particular, tended to choose advertised products despite more favorable attitudes toward other alternatives. They ignored their initial preferences, and focused instead, on the immediate ad content in making their choices. Thirteen year-olds, on the other hand, remained faithful to their initial preferences, regardless of the advertisement that they had just seen. While eighth graders (13 year-olds) appeared to consider their attitudes toward each product and then select the one they most preferred regardless of advertising, fourth graders made their choices exclusively on the basis of their evaluation of the advertised product. The adolescents resorted to this strategy only when the decision task was complex, involving a large number of choice alternatives. Both of these age groups possess at least a rudimentary understanding of advertising's purpose and the cognitive defenses it presumably provides.

The causal links between advertising exposure and children's product choices have been well-established under controlled conditions. These effects are much more difficult to study and observe in the context of a child's every day life. Though the generalizability of these results is an issue, the findings indicate that children can be influenced not only to prefer advertised products but to seek them out when given the opportunity to do so.

Product Consumption: A Primary Source of Meaning and Influence

Given the policy orientation that underpins research effort in this area, it is not surprising that investigators have focused their attention on understanding advertising's ability to shape children's product preferences, requests and choices. If advertisements have the capacity to influence children's desire for particular products, then policymakers have an unquestioned responsibility to insure that the contents of these communications are fair, given the unique nature of the target audience. Both the processes by which advertising affects children's judgments and the persuasive techniques that are most effective are of primary interest. Implicitly, it is assumed that advertising exerts its primary influence prior to a purchase decision and therefore investigation tends to focus on variables that somehow affect children's initial product preferences. However, long-standing conceptual models of consumer decision making recognize that the purchase process ends not with choice but with product consumption, use and evaluation (Engel, Kollat and Blackwell 1968). From the consumer's perspective, it is through consumption that the significance of product benefits are expressed and enjoyed. Children respond to advertisements, not in isolation but in the context of the experiences they have had, both good and bad with heavily promoted products. Advertising and consumption are interwoven, their relationship circular rather than linear. Children view ads, try products and often view those same ads again, this time accompanied by newfound insight and understanding. Advertisements are interpreted in the context of this ongoing stream of increased awareness and experience. However, as researchers we know very little about how children relate these everyday experiences to the captivating visuals, flights of

fantasy and mythical figures that tend to dominate children's advertising. Where this investigation departs from traditional models of children's advertising response, is with the explicit recognition that product consumption plays a central role in guiding children's comprehension and interpretation of advertisements. What occurs once a product leaves a retailer's shelf is as critical as what happens before.

How children characterize or interpret their product experiences is significant both in terms of the immediate situation or product as well as with regard to their more enduring notions about marketing activities and influence. Though children have ample opportunity to learn about products through advertising, many commercial sources that an adult might consult for additional information are relatively inaccessible to a young consumer. For example, until they are functionally literate, children are denied access to most information conveyed through the print media. Information on packages and labels or in non-commercial media may be not only difficult to decipher but of little interest to children. Children also lack information about price, one of the most important sources of information in adult decision making (Barcus 1980; Meringoff and Lesser 1980). Concerns about how best to allocate limited income are simply not salient nor well understood until much later. While adults may ponder the opportunity costs of their decisions, children's consumption experiences are characterized by aesthetic enjoyment, playful activity and fun. Products can be evaluated and consumed without the attendant economic responsibility or concern.

What may appear initially to be a simple issue of determining the veridicality of advertising-induced expectations turns out to have much broader implications for the

child's understanding of marketplace behavior. On the one hand, product experiences may serve as a kind of corrective to the type of exaggerated expectations advertisements may sometimes foster. Any confusion created by an advertisement can be rectified when a child has the opportunity to compare ad claims to the objective reality represented by the product. On the other hand, when children's expectations are realistic, product experiences provide evidence of advertising's reliability as a source of information and ideas. In either case, the implicit comparison between the product as advertised and the product as experienced provides the fledgling consumer with valuable information about what advertising is and how it works. What may seem obvious to adults about what and how advertisers communicate with consumers is novel information to children. Advertising is a communications genre unlike any other that children come in contact with, and they will attempt to make sense of it. Learning about advertising, its unique characteristics and modes of expression is an important part of what children are doing in responding to ads. Over time they begin to develop tacit knowledge or intuitive theories about how advertising works (Wright 1986). Product experiences serve an important role in this process not only as a sort of reality check but as the basis for learning about marketplace interaction. Although children can learn a great deal through advertising alone, it is the comparison of the ad to the product that provides the evidence needed to evaluate what the advertiser has stated or implied. Children's broader perceptions of marketers and marketing activity are grounded in the simple pleasures or disappointments these experiences yield.

Translating Product Meaning: From the Mundane to the Magical

The associations children construct between advertisements and the products they promote are fundamental to their emerging understanding of the marketplace. Without the opportunity to contrast their own experiences with the idealized images conveyed by advertisements, children would lose the most basic source of information they have available about marketing activity and influence. However, the specific character of these linkages are neither simple nor necessarily direct. To begin to appreciate how children perceive the ad-consumption relationship, requires first, an understanding of the nature of the task with which they are faced.

Broadly speaking, children encounter consumer products in one of two distinct contexts. On the one hand, they may learn about a brand through their own direct experiences. Sitting on a kitchen shelf, in a lunch box or sampled at a friend's house, the brand may be part of a child's familiar, everyday world. The brand is acquired, consumed and disposed of, through the ordinary course of day-to-day life. It exists in the realm of the commonplace or conventional. Alternatively, children may be exposed to a brand through the imagery of an advertisement. Here, the brand is located in a figurative or symbolic world, explicitly fashioned to extend the brand's meaning and appeal. The advertiser's task is to transport the brand from the world of the mundane and familiar, to the more ephemeral symbolic realm (Young 1990). Through the language and images of advertising, the brand is elevated from the ordinary or everyday context of existence to one replete with fantasy, play and adventure. To depict the product in its most appealing light, the advertiser seeks to move the brand from the realm

of the everyday, to a world imbued with appealing signs and symbols. Through the advertisement, a broader context is crafted for the brand, one that not only positions the brand within the marketplace but mirrors the desires and interests of a young audience. The advertiser must not only select desired properties for the product among a wide range of possibilities but successfully evoke intended consumer reaction in the narrow frame of an advertisement. An advertisement is not a neutral entity but a fluid, cultural construction. The potential for meaning resides at a number of levels from the obvious to the culturally interpreted (McCracken 1987). The content of persuasive appeals shapes the meanings brands ultimately acquire. Advertising is one of the primary mechanisms through which cultural beliefs, assumptions and values are transferred to consumer goods (McCracken 1986). The transition from brand in the world to brand in the ad is a complex process, not only from the advertiser's perspective but from the receiver's perspective as well.

How children interpret or perhaps reconcile these varying sources of brand information is neither clear nor necessarily simple. The seemingly objective reality of a consumption experience is juxtaposed against the symbolic experience of an advertisement. Both of these experiences have the potential to shape or transform the interpretation of the other. That product experience may affect a child's subsequent responsiveness and reactions to an advertisement makes sense, intuitively. That an advertisement may have the capacity to alter a child's interpretations of his(her) consumption experience is both intriguing and potentially disturbing (Hoch and Ha 1986; Puto and Wells 1984). Research that attempts to characterize the process by which

children integrate and internalize these disparate marketplace stimuli represents an important first step towards understanding the likely consequences of ad-consumption interactions.

From the child's perspective, the transition requires the capacity to translate product representations between disparate experiential and viewing contexts. The advertiser takes the simple or mundane and envelops it with symbolic properties or significance. To the extent that the consumption experience represents a kind of literal reality, the depiction of the brand in the ad appears to require more figuratively based interpretive strategies (Young 1990). Children's advertisers frequently employ fantasy, hyperbole, humor and simple metaphors to create attractive brand images. Mythical beings, magical transformations and whimsical flights of fantasy are the rule rather than the exception. The development of an understanding of non-literal uses of language and visual images is an important mediator of the meaning children assign to ads utilizing these creative techniques. However, the process of learning to interpret media communications on a figurative level is both complex and protracted (Young 1986). At a very simple level, preschool children spontaneously generate creative metaphors, playfully fusing literal reality and fantasy (Winner 1988). School-age children, on the other hand, seem to approach communications from a much more literal perspective. Messages tend to be strictly interpreted or taken at face value. Though an eight year-old recognizes the discrepancy between the message and reality in an advertisement that incorporates obvious exaggeration (s)he may not fully understand the communicator's purpose in employing this technique (Young 1990). The advertiser is likely to be

regarded as having simply made a mistake rather than having intentionally selected a non-literal execution. As children enter late childhood or early adolescence (approximately 11-12 years-old) their fascination with and use of figurative language seems to re-emerge in a more sophisticated fashion (Winner 1988).

There is no single competency that suddenly allows children to fully appreciate the use of non-literal portrayals in advertising or other types of communications. Rather, a collection of interpretive skills gradually emerges which allow children to assess both the form and content of a message as well as its source. The concept of persuasive intent captures only a subset of the skills needed to achieve full "adult" comprehension of commercial messages employing hyperbole, metaphor and visual imagery to persuade. Children's understanding of the meaning of advertised messages also depends on their capacity to (1) distinguish fantasy from reality, (2) differentiate between literal and non-literal uses of visual and verbal message elements, (3) recognize that there is both a source and an audience for the message who have distinct perspectives and motives and (4) recognize that advertisements require different interpretive strategies than educational or entertainment oriented messages (Roberts 1982; Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Young 1990). These emerging capabilities are rooted in children's expanding experience in social and economic spheres as well as their information processing achievements.

At the most basic level, children need to be able to step outside their own point of view and understand the point of view of another person before they can begin to appreciate an advertiser's profit orientation (Faber, Perloff and Hawkins 1982). In straightforward informational contexts, even very young children are able to mentally

represent the knowledge and beliefs of other people (Ackerman 1981; Perner 1988). However, they may encounter interpretive difficulty when someone breaks with conversational convention through non-literal or figurative uses of language. Until children are ten to eleven years-old, they tend to be rather literal in their interpretive strategies. In situations where there is a lack of simple agreement between what is said and what is meant, young children have difficulty not so much in recognizing, but in reconciling the apparent discrepancy. Children tend to assume that people say what they mean, so that the possibility that someone might employ puns, irony or pretense may not occur to them (Winner 1988; Young 1990). Given the symbolic character of advertising and the frequency of non-literal executions, the literal character of young children's comprehension strategies may have important consequences for how children reconcile these images with the concrete day-to-day reality of the brand in a consumption context.

Though a fundamental shift in children's processing strategies and awareness of advertising's selling intent seems to occur at around seven or eight years of age, the evolution in children's interpretive strategies continues throughout the elementary school years. While children as young as second grade (6 to 7 years of age) have the capacity to recognize symbolic properties in consumer products, it is between fourth and sixth grades (9 to 12 years) that children begin to suggest more symbolic interpretations of marketing stimuli (Belk, Bahn and Mayer 1982; Belk, Mayer and Driscoll 1984). Rather than simply reading ads as a series of events or incidents, children of this age group may interpret message elements in terms of their symbolic properties, as reflective of cultural meanings. While younger children may tend to focus on the perceptual qualities of an

advertisement or their emotional reactions to it, older children have the capacity to comment on the ad as a cultural object. No longer drawn primarily to perceptual features, older children begin to distance themselves from the immediate message and think about, evaluate and judge it in a more reflective fashion (Ward et al. 1977; Young 1986, 1990).

One of the developmental accomplishments of the elementary school period is an increasingly sophisticated approach to judging fantasy and reality in television programs and print media (Kelly 1981; Winnick and Winnick 1979). The criteria older children (10-12 year-olds) apply to judging reality are multifaceted and complex. While a seven year-old tends to judge reality on the basis of outward appearance or format, and physical possibility or impossibility, older children's assessments reflect a sensitivity to the inner content of a message. Issues of possibility are considered not only in terms of physical phenomena but in relation to social and psychological reality as well (Kelly 1981; Young 1990). Plausibility on a number of dimensions enters the judgment equation, making a child's appraisal of what constitutes reality, like an adult's, increasingly complex. The consequences of possessing multiple criteria for judging fantasy and reality in an advertising context remain unexplored. While this enhanced sophistication might be expected to aid comprehension, its likely impact on persuasion is not as clear. Whether older children might entertain a broader array of plausible hypotheses regarding the meaning of the ad, and its links to the brand, warrants future research attention.

What does seem apparent, is clear developmental change in the breadth and depth with which children interpret and evaluate media content during middle childhood.

Extending what are initially simple concepts of selling intent and advertising technique, a host of interpretive skills emerge that allow older children to construct meaning on a number of levels ranging from the articulation of basic facts to their cultural significance. A gradual shift in children's perspectives emerges; from a point of view embedded in the textual features of an ad and the world it portrays, to a more detached perspective in which the perceiver begins to step outside the ad to think about it in a broader and more critical fashion (Desmond 1985; Young 1990). Among older children, deeper and socially meaningful levels of meaning may be extracted that are not directly expressed. Inferences about situations and their significance, characters' motives and values are readily drawn by children (5th-8th graders) in response to television programming (Collins 1983). However, relatively little is known about how children use their newfound interpretive abilities in the context of television advertising and inferred relationships to product consumption.

Where children's responses are concerned, many uncertainties remain. How children perceive the relationships between the advertisements they see and the products they consume is not well-understood. The way an adult is likely to respond to an advertisement differs from what might be expected from a child in several important respects. Adults are not only more skeptical than children but much more likely to act on this knowledge as they interpret and evaluate advertisements. They recognize that the utility of advertised information varies widely. Ads are perceived to be more or less believable depending on the nature of the claims made. Adults readily recognize puffery and appeals to emotion and are more skeptical of ad claims that are difficult to verify.

They rely on their knowledge of advertisers' influence tactics to evaluate advertising claims and adapt their performance expectations accordingly. When an advertiser's message can be easily and inexpensively verified before purchase, adults are more likely to assume that what the advertiser says is true. On the other hand, when product claims can be evaluated only by purchasing and using a product, adults tend to be much less willing to believe what they see advertised (Ford, Smith and Swasy 1990; Smith, Ford and Swasy 1990). Claims that have a high probability of truth are differentiated from those of a more uncertain character and evaluated on that basis. Children, on the other hand, may not readily appreciate nor be concerned with the quality of information provided by advertisers. Though they may articulate adult-like attitudes about advertising, these generalized indicators may bear little relationship to how they respond to specific messages or persuasive claims. Whether children judge the veracity of ad claims, recognizing the difference between claims that are easily verified and those that are not, is not as clear. The question is one of performance as much as capacity. Claims that are plausible and attractive yet difficult to verify may be more readily believed and confirmed through a pleasant consumption experience.

A Call for a Meaning-Based Perspective

Children's advertising research clearly highlights the need to embed understanding in the context of how children of various ages comprehend and evaluate persuasive messages. There is no question that children's ability to process information conveyed through advertising differs as a function of their relative experience and cognitive sophistication. Serious inquiry must take into account children's emerging skills,

proclivities, and the contingencies in which they operate. Theories of cognitive development have provided useful frameworks for both conceptualization and empirical efforts investigating children's responses to advertising. Paradigmatically, an information-centered young consumer is assumed. Advertisements are viewed primarily as purveyors of brand information. Age-related changes in children's ability to store, manipulate and retrieve information are examined in terms of their impact on children's comprehension of advertised claims and attitudes toward the brand promoted. Insights gleaned from these studies provide the necessary basis for understanding how children's judgments and processing strategies evolve. However, while this research provides depth of insight into the functioning of information processing variables, it sacrifices breadth of insight into the broader cultural and affective context in which children think about advertisements and consume products.

In this investigation, a meaning-based model provides the basic framework for examination of children's perceptions of the advertising-consumption relationship. Insight into how children construe these relationships is sought, within the general constraints imposed by developmental capabilities for acquiring, retaining and utilizing marketplace information. The meaning-based approach, focused at a broader level than information processing approaches, expressly recognizes the cultural context of consumption (McCracken 1987; Watkins 1985). Investigation of consumer experience originates from the position that individuals live and consume in a meaningfully constituted world, that has been structured by the beliefs and values of a culture. Advertisements and consumer goods each play a key role in the transmission and

expression of these cultural norms and values (McCracken 1986). Through their anticipation, choice and consumption, products are a prominent source of meanings that individuals draw upon in constructing notions of self, status and community. This process of negotiating and refining conceptions of self and the social world is an ongoing developmental process throughout the life-span. Movement through the life cycle, changing circumstances, as well as evolving needs and preferences each bring about re-evaluation and refinement. Children, actively and primarily engaged in the process of defining their sense of self and society, may be particularly responsive, within the general constraints imposed by information processing capabilities, to the meanings contained in consumer goods. These are not meanings in a deep, philosophical sense but useful ideas about the structure, expectations and values of the culture in which they live. The central developmental task of childhood is to learn what it means to be an adult, in all its complexity and nuance. Consumer goods, in their acquisition and use, are a key source of cultural material and insight for the child.

Advertising is also implicated in the transmission and expression of cultural meanings. It is the channel through which meanings are transported from the world of everyday existence to consumer goods. Advertising, in a sense, captures cultural meanings and invests them in consumer goods (McCracken 1986, 1987). It makes accessible to children expressions of the culture in which they are learning to live and contribute. As active participants in this process, children learn about the contents and range of cultural meaning that exist in consumer goods (McCracken 1986). The picture of the world as conveyed through advertising shapes or influences the picture of the

world that is constructed through childhood. Children attend to advertising in search of meaning, things that can be used in the process of constructing emerging definitions of the self, the larger community in which they live and the marketplace arena. They search not only for product information but for insight into what it means to be a child, and what a child becomes. Research grounded in a meaning-based approach, explicitly adopts this more inclusive perspective on children's advertising response. It provides the conceptual foundation necessary to begin to address issues that look beyond purely cognitive construals of how children make sense of the advertisements and products that permeate their lives.

Where cognitive processing models may fall short, is in their failure to consider that the individual who is processing information is immersed in a highly structured and meaningful environment. In viewing an advertisement, consuming a product, or comparing the two, a child is a recipient not just of information but of meaning. How (s)he interprets and evaluates these experiences is a consequence of the cultural understanding (s)he brings to bear, as well as her(his) information processing capabilities. Meaning is created and confirmed through the process of interpretation, definition and interaction (Reid and Frazer 1980). Without benefit of substantial marketplace experience and fully mature processing strategies, children unravel, shape and construct meaningful interpretations of their consumption related experiences. Though these constructions may sometimes bear little relationship to adult explanations, they represent a valid database for furthering scientific insight. What do not seem to exist in any substantial way, are investigations documenting how children's natural responses to

marketplace stimuli represent a successful adaptation to the condition and environment of being a child. Minimal data on children's perspectives of their consumer experiences is available, a perspective that only becomes accessible if researchers are willing to suspend belief in traditional notions of children as in process, cognitively limited and lacking real understanding. Much like an ethnocentric bias in anthropological study, the interpretation of children's behavior exclusively in adult terms, severely limits the scope of scientific understanding. To understand how children make sense of their experiences, requires a sensitivity not only to their cognitive skills and limitations but to their unique perspectives on the marketplace and its impact on their lives. Their perceptions, judgments and opinions provide valuable information not obtainable through any other source.

The Interaction of Advertising and Product Trial

Though researchers have traditionally focused on advertising's prepurchase impact on consumer behavior, there is growing consensus that advertising's effects may be detected not only at the time of exposure, but later, in the context of product use (Aaker and Stayman 1992; Deighton 1984; Deighton and Schindler 1988; Hoch and Ha 1986; Levin and Gaeth 1988; Marks and Kamins 1988; Olson and Dover 1979; Puto and Hoyer 1990; Puto and Wells 1984). Though conceptual perspectives and aims differ, researchers agree that an advertisement may help to cultivate associations with a product experience, so that the experience is different than it would have been without exposure to the ad. Advertising may engender feelings that are linked to the experience of using the product, so that it becomes more fun, exciting, or intriguing than it would otherwise

be (Aaker and Stayman 1992; Puto and Wells 1984). Alternatively, advertised claims may be construed as hypotheses that consumers subsequently test out in the context of using a product, shaping their interpretations and evaluations (Hoch and Ha 1986). Irrespective of whether cognitive or affective explanations are sought, there is clear evidence, at least among adult consumers, that advertisers have the ability to reach into the consumption experience and influence how it is perceived and evaluated (Aaker and Stayman 1992; Deighton 1984; Deighton and Schindler 1988; Hoch and Ha 1986; Levin and Gaeth 1988; Marks and Kamins 1988; Olson and Dover 1979).

Whether, and to what extent, advertising actually affects product use depends on the character of the consumption experience itself. When product performance is easily and unambiguously judged, advertising is easily discounted. In this situation, adults are unlikely to rely on advertising to direct the interpretive process (Hoch and Ha 1986). However, there are many consumption occasions when the indicants of product performance are neither obvious nor easily assessed. Typically, product quality is not solely a function of a product's concrete attributes but of more intangible, subjective properties as well. Questions of product quality or value are often not unequivocally resolved through product consumption. When a product experience is potentially ambiguous or open to multiple interpretations, advertising may exert a significant influence on consumers' assessments of quality and enjoyment. Though adults recognize that advertisements are partisan sources, they may develop tentative expectations on the basis of ad claims that are difficult to verify directly (Deighton 1984). Many commonplace product experiences are supportive of multiple interpretations. From soft

drinks to the latest in hip-hop fashions, product use is laden with meaning that accrues from sources beyond its physical form (McCracken 1986). In these types of situations, advertisements have the capacity to alter the consumer's experience by suggesting what features should be attended to and remembered (Deighton 1984, 1988). Ads may offer clues that consumers rely on to interpret their feelings and perceptions.

As a relatively new area of inquiry, research investigation into the effects of advertising on consumption naturally reflects many unresolved conceptual and measurement issues. One of the clear challenges in this area is to develop methods that effectively capture advertising's experiential influence. New, non-traditional approaches are required to isolate these effects, their consequences and determinants (Aaker and Stayman 1992; Puto and Wells 1984; Wells 1986). Continued conceptual clarification and refinement is also needed to promote understanding. Ambiguity surrounding the precise nature of advertising's impact on consumption is evident in the terms and methods used to investigate this topic (Deighton 1988).

Most of the research investigating the relationship between advertising and product experience can be identified with one of two conceptual approaches (1) transformational advertising or (2) the experiential learning or "hypothesis-testing" approach. Though the explanatory bases for these models clearly differ, they retain important commonalities. Both suggest that advertising can influence what consumers think about in the context of consumption. Both seem to cast advertising's persuasive power in terms of its ability to direct consumer conclusions or inference (Deighton 1986, 1988). Both suggest that the consumption experience changes as a consequence of

advertising exposure. Precisely how these changes are hypothesized to occur, however, differs across the two approaches.

The hypothesis-testing model adopts an information-centered orientation, focusing on how advertising influences what consumers learn from their product experiences (Hoch and Ha 1986). Claims made by an advertiser may affect how consumers judge, interpret and evaluate their product experiences. According to this model, consumers treat advertised claims as tentative hypotheses or expectations about product performance. From an adult's perspective, advertisers are viewed as partisan sources who lack full credibility. Before adults are willing to accept a claim made by an advertiser, they seek some sort of independent evidence or corroboration. Either product consumption or a search for additional information provides the opportunity to test a hypothesis engendered by an advertisement. How the ad-based information and experiential evidence are integrated depends on the characteristics of the decision environment and the consumer's competence within it (Hoch and Ha 1986). The hypothesis-testing model implicitly assumes an experienced if not infallible consumer. Even as adults, processing may be distorted by confirmatory biases and overconfidence (Deighton 1984; Hoch and Deighton 1989). Unless the consumption experience provides unambiguous evidence about product quality, adults tend to confirm their original expectations (Hoch and Ha 1986). By helping consumers to make sense of their product experiences, advertising can influence what consumers come to believe about the products they consume.

The "transformational" model, on the other hand, focuses more directly on advertising's affective consequences. It suggests that advertising can shape a

consumption experience by inextricably attaching feelings and impressions to a brand so that the consumer's experience is fundamentally different than it would have been in the absence of ad exposure (Puto and Wells 1984). The feelings and thoughts evoked by the advertisement become so closely tied to the consumption experience that the brand cannot be recalled apart from the ad. In effect, the ad "transforms" or alters the experience of consuming the brand by helping the consumer to understand and appreciate their feelings. Not to be confused with transformational argumentation, which is a form rather than a consequence of advertising, transformational effects occur when an advertisement influences what consumers notice, attend or react to during product consumption (Deighton 1988; Deighton, Romer and McQueen 1989; Wells 1986, 1988). Persuasion is a function of the audience's willingness to enter into the story, to suspend disbelief temporarily and allow the advertiser to set the agenda. The advertisement's persuasive power derives not from its ability to change consumers' beliefs directly but in its capacity to tell consumers what to think or feel, its ability to frame the consumption experience (Deighton 1988).

Where the concept of transformation seems to depart most clearly from the experiential learning approach, is in the former's explicit inclusion of affective influences (Puto and Hoyer 1990; Puto and Wells 1984; Wells 1986). Not only can advertising influence what consumers attend to and what product expectations they might develop, but what feelings are evoked in the context of a consumption experience. When researchers focus on transformational effects, it is the ad-induced feelings brought forward into the usage context, that are of primary interest.

This emphasis on advertising's emotional impact has led some researchers to equate incorrectly, affect-based or image advertising with the transformational concept. However, transformational effects are not intrinsic to an advertisement but are defined by consumers' perceptions of message contents. An advertisement may have transformational aims, but not effects, if consumers fail to construct linkages between the message and their consumption experiences. An advertisement may have the capacity to stir powerful emotions that are never directly associated with the experience of consuming the brand. In that situation, the ad may be persuasive but it is not transformational. Though ecologically correlated with emotional or dramatic executions, transformational effects may occur in connection with informational appeals as well (Aaker and Stayman 1992; Deighton 1988). The key is the advertisement's capacity to alter the experience, whether the appeal is emotional, informational or both.

The finding that adults may rely on advertising claims to interpret their product experiences is surprising and perhaps even disconcerting. What has been assumed to be beyond the realm of marketing's influence may often be well within its reaches (Hoch and Deighton 1989). Marketing managers seemingly have the capacity to reach into the consumption experience and alter its meaning and value. Current research approaches have provided key insights into the scope and character of advertising's influence on consumers' interpretations of their product experiences. Though the primary emphases of the transformational and hypothesis-testing models differ, these approaches clearly complement and enhance one another. Both models implicitly recognize the interplay of affective and cognitive factors in consumers' interpretations of advertising-consumption

relationships. However, neither explanation fully captures the influence of both. The learning or hypothesis-testing model draws almost exclusively on cognitive concepts and processes to conceptualize the interaction between advertising and product evidence. According to this approach, advertising can exert substantial influence on what consumers learn from their product experiences. Of primary interest, is the process underlying advertising's impact on consumers' beliefs and product evaluations. The transformational approach, on the other hand, focuses on the ad's capacity to create affective associations that alter the consumption experience. It is the advertisement's ability to create, modify or intensify the feelings consumers experience while using the product that has captured researcher attention and interest. While the transformational approach emphasizes affective consequences, it seems to draw implicitly on the logic of the hypothesis-testing model as well. A central tenet of the transformational model is that advertising helps to direct consumers' attention and interpretive strategies in the context of product consumption (Wells 1986). That the ad helps the consumer to interpret his(her) consumption related thoughts and feelings, is compatible with the learning explanation offered by proponents of the hypothesis-testing model. Both of these approaches provide a useful perspective on the relationship between advertising and use experience. Neither approach is incompatible with the observation that advertisements often evoke both cognitive and affective responses, particularly in the realm of children's advertising where brand information is typically conveyed through the filter of lighthearted, creative and playful appeals.

It is in the context of children's advertisements, products and common experiences that the utility of these models now needs to be assessed. Effective children's ads use striking imagery and language to enlarge a brand's meaning and value. To transport a brand from the realm of everyday life to a more attractive and symbolic context, children's advertisers frequently rely on fanciful and imaginative executions. Advertisements may have the greatest potential to affect a child's product experience when they are plausible and engaging, but elusive and difficult to dispute directly. Not only is the product experience potentially ambiguous, as researchers have suggested (Ha and Hoch 1989; Hoch and Ha 1986), but the advertisement itself is cast in such a way that its content can be construed along multiple, equally credible paths. Whether, and how children draw on these intriguing but beguiling formats in the context of their experiences is not clear. Researchers with an interest in this topic have focused their efforts on understanding adult processing strategies. Though current conceptualizations provide insight into how advertising may help children interpret their consumption experiences, the validity of these models can't simply be assumed but must re-examined in the context of children's lives.

Prevailing Paradigms and Children's Reality

The theoretical models that have been developed to study the relationship between advertising and product experience embody several key assumptions about how adults respond to marketer-controlled sources of information (e.g., Deighton 1984; Hoch and Deighton 1989). Within this general framework, consumers are characterized as skilled but pragmatic thinkers who: (1) search for product information in order to make choices

among consumer goods; (2) typically respond to advertising with skepticism because of its inherently partisan character; and (3) treat advertised claims as tentative expectations to be assessed through additional information search or product experience. Because these assumptions underpin current conceptualizations of the relationship between advertising and use experience, their validity in the context of children's responses is an important issue.

Like children's advertising research, current models of the advertising-consumption relationship presume that ads are evaluated primarily in terms of the information they provide about a product's features and performance. Advertisements make claims about products, and if the claims are judged to be reasonable, they may be used to make sense of subsequent product experiences. These claims are treated as tentative expectations to be examined through subsequent experience or additional information available in the marketplace. Predisposed to respond skeptically, adults treat advertised claims as mere conjectures that may or may not prove to be correct. Only when the decision environment is ambiguous do advertisements influence how these experiences are interpreted or judged (Ha and Hoch 1989; Hoch and Deighton 1989; Hoch and Ha 1986; Wells 1986). Children, on the other hand, are more likely to accept ad claims, are often drawn to the products they see depicted and tend not to respond skeptically unless reminded to do so (Adler et al. 1980; Brucks et al. 1988; Roedder et al. 1983; Ward et al. 1977).

Whether children treat advertised claims as provisional hypotheses that are subsequently used to evaluate the products they obtain, is not clear. Conceptual models

of the advertising-consumption relationship seem to assume that by exposing consumers to advertised information a set of clear expectations about a product will be formed. Though children between the ages of 7 and 12 have the cognitive capacity to form specific expectations about product performance, the precise nature of product performance claims is not always obvious in children's advertisements. While informational ads intended for adults frequently provide attribute information in a clear and concise manner, children's advertisements tend to embed performance claims in imaginary or fanciful scenes. Though these creative executions may be quite persuasive, they may not serve as a basis for the formation of specific performance expectations. The hypothesis-testing model, in particular, rests on the assumption that advertisements provide concrete, accessible information about a brand that consumers can easily draw upon as they form tentative expectations about its performance. Though this is certainly true of informational appeals, it does not accurately reflect ads that employ transformational argumentation (Deighton 1988; Deighton et al. 1989; Wells 1986, 1988). Informational appeals are those that attempt to educate and persuade through concrete, well-substantiated performance claims. Explicit benefits are presented and when effective, consumers accept or believe message arguments. Transformational appeals, on the other hand, rely on stories, drama, vivid examples and emotion to shape product meaning and value (Deighton et al. 1989; Wells 1988). With these executional styles, the brand's appeal may be richer, more abstract and difficult to reduce to a single theme. Here, persuasion is not the result of solid argumentation but compelling example, the capacity of the ad to draw the consumer into the situation or story (Deighton 1988).

In the realm of children's advertising, transformational appeals are quite common. Even the most information laden commercials targeted at children typically retain transformational properties, so that the distinction, in practice, does not reflect mutually exclusive categories. Because children's ads frequently rely on whimsy and tales of adventure to persuade, the link between the message and specific performance dimensions may not be clear. When Cap'n Crunch and his crew through great ingenuity and effort rescue the crunchberries from their foes, "the soggies", what expectations about the product might a child be likely to generate? Clearly, there is information about the cereal's crunchiness and its ability to remain so with time, but even this simple idea has to be extracted from a narrative structure that embeds notions about the triumph of right over wrong, skill over ignorance, and teamwork, in an attempt to enhance the product's perceived value. To transcend a commonplace event such as eating a bowl of cereal, the advertiser creates a world of excitement and adventure. The brand may acquire added value and meaning through this process. However, the consumer's ability to translate advertised claims into specific hypotheses about performance may be compromised. Children may be less likely than adults to generate clear expectations about product performance, not because they are cognitively ill-equipped but because of the way children's advertisements are designed and executed. Both the development of relevant hypotheses by the young viewer and the testing of these expectations in a usage context may be complicated by the creative strategies commonly adopted by children's advertisers. Though at some level, the meaning creation process requires that children forge links between the advertisement and the consumption experience, these links may

not necessarily take the form of hypotheses. Both the hypothesis-testing model and children's advertising research, more generally, clearly reflect an information-oriented approach to studying persuasive effects.

Implicit within the research literature is the assumption that children think about advertisements primarily in terms of the product related information they provide. Researchers have studied whether children understand and are persuaded by advertised claims, while paying relatively little attention to how children spontaneously relate to the advertisements they encounter. Children's responses to advertising may be governed by contingencies that have little to do with hypothesis-testing or the verification of ad claims. Rather than thinking about advertisements purely in terms of their information value, children may also be inclined to base their responses on affective dimensions that have little to do with product claims. An ad's capacity to elicit emotion or feeling among young viewers certainly plays a more important role in the persuasion process than traditional approaches to studying children's advertising response represent (Wartella 1984). To the extent that transformational ads are most persuasive when they charm, entertain or captivate attention, an exclusive reliance on cognitive concepts and theory may paint a rather narrow picture of advertising's influence and meaning in children's lives. With its greater emphasis on the affective dimensions of ad response, the transformational model offers a perspective on the advertising-consumption relationship that is more closely aligned with the unique style and character of children's advertising. However, this paradigm is of less value in understanding the ad-consumption relation in terms of its broader implications for children's understanding of the marketplace.

Alternative approaches that focus attention at a more molar level are also needed to address basic substantive questions. From a child's perspective, how focal are the links between advertisements and consumption? What are the categories of meaning that children draw upon in thinking about advertisements and their product experiences? How are these categories embedded in children's larger conceptions of what advertising is and how it works? Only through acknowledging the validity of children's perspectives can these questions be answered. By allowing children to tell their side of the story, through their own language and point of view, real insight can be gained. Rather than constraining investigation to "adultcentric" models, it is important to adopt a more inclusive perspective, one that reflects children's categories, culture and experience. Without doubt, there is need for research into children's expectations and their potential impact on product experience. However, to understand fully children's consumption experiences requires a broader research agenda, one that begins to look beyond policy-driven applications and reflects an openness to new methods and perspectives. Drawing on a meaning-based model of advertising experience, this set of studies departs from traditional approaches to children's advertising response. Insight into how children make sense of the advertisements and the products they consume, is sought, within the constraints imposed by their developmental abilities to process marketplace information. Until the validity of children's unique perspectives is incorporated into the theories that guide empirical research, our collective insight into children's experiences and the consumer socialization process remains incomplete.

CHAPTER 3

STUDY 1

Though children's responses to advertising have been the focus of numerous research investigations, rarely have these investigations explicitly considered the broader context in which products are also purchased and consumed. Examining children's reactions within this larger embedding system opens the door to new insights, concepts and relationships. At the same time, it poses new conceptual and methodological challenges. That product consumption affects how children think about advertisements is obvious; how best to study the nature and scope of its influence is not nearly so clear. What little research investigating advertising-consumption relationships exists, has focused on adult populations and processing strategies (e.g., Deighton 1984; Deighton and Schindler 1988; Hoch and Ha 1986; Puto and Wells 1984). Adult skills and breadth of experience is presumed, serving as the basis for continuing conceptualization and measurement. Still in its infancy as a research area, significant methodological challenges remain, particularly with respect to advertisements with transformational aims (Wells 1986). Traditional recall and attitude measures may not fully capture advertising's more subtle impact on consumers' product experiences (Puto and Wells 1984). Until new research techniques and procedures evolve, understanding of advertising's capacity to shape a consumption experience is necessarily limited.

Questions about how to approach the study of advertising-consumption relationships are magnified considerably when the consumers are children. Not only are

questions about measurement at issue, but at a more fundamental level, the conceptual fit of current models in terms of children's experiences and abilities also warrants careful reflection. Whether the hypothesis-testing model, which presumes a fully literate information-centered consumer, is relevant to how children attach meaning to advertisements and products is not clear. Intuitively, this approach, derived from a cognitively driven explanatory framework and tested in the context of informational advertising, does not seem to mirror either children's proclivities or the ads designed to reach a young audience. Even the transformational model, which expressly calls into play affective dimensions and a broader array of advertising formats, has not been subjected to empirical testing among either adult or youth populations. Empirical examination of the transformational concept has focused exclusively on the measurement of the construct rather than its impact in judgment or choice contexts (e.g., Aaker and Stayman 1992; Puto and Hoyer 1990; Puto and Wells 1984). The elusiveness of advertising's transformational properties and the inadequacy of traditional research methods may explain why this intriguing concept remains largely unexplored. At this juncture, existing conceptualizations of the interaction between advertising and product experience can best be characterized as very useful but tentative tools for understanding children's responses. Whether they map onto children's reality or are sufficiently broad enough to capture the range and complexity of children's thoughts and feelings is an empirical question, or, more accurately, a series of empirical questions. The legitimacy of these conceptual frameworks in the realm of children's media experience can not simply be assumed. Understanding must be grounded in the reality of children's

everyday encounters with products and advertisements. Without this grounding, the authenticity and value of research conclusions would be compromised.

Research Approach

In the first phase of this research project, a qualitative investigation with both substantive and methodological aims was carried out. This study was designed to develop a preliminary understanding of how children conceive of the relationships between advertisements and products, and to evaluate the validity of phenomenological interview research methods with school aged children. Discovery-oriented research approaches which enable the researcher to remain true to the perspectives of respondents, offer the opportunity to gain substantive insight into how children assess and manage their consumption experiences. Because the context of consumption is so little understood, initial research aims for this project were open-ended and broadly focused. Uncertainty about the relevance of adult-derived models and the heretofore neglect of consumption issues within the area of children's research, led to the choice of an inductive research approach focusing on the generation of conceptual categories and relationships. Rather than beginning with a theory and attempting to test it, the research began with the substantive area and what is relevant to that area was allowed to emerge (Denzin 1988; Kvale 1983; Lincoln and Guba 1985; McCracken 1988; Thompson, Locander and Pollio 1989; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Without insight into the primary factors that motivate and shape children's marketplace perceptions, researchers may run the risk of creating abstract representations that have little basis in real-world events (Wells 1993). This hazard may be particularly

enticing in developmental research studies where the temptation to adopt adultlike performance standards abounds (Anderson 1981; Dorr 1986; Rust and Hyatt 1991). Though children have been the focus of numerous research investigations, rarely have they been asked to share their own, unique accounts of the commercial environment. When asked to describe their experiences, their responses are coded into theoretically derived developmental categories established prior to data collection (e.g., Bever et al. 1975; Rossiter and Robertson 1974; Ward et al 1977). The substantive import of their subjective perceptions tends either to be lost through the coding process or simply discounted. To approach children from a phenomenological orientation requires that researchers recognize that children have their own perspectives and strategies for dealing with the world that surrounds them. Children interpret the world differently than adults not simply because they have not yet learned to process information "properly" but because they view the world in their own terms.

Two alternative views of children, one as hapless victim of marketer tactics and the other as savvy consumer, are reflected in the research literature. At the extremes, children's advertising is either powerfully seductive or so uninspiring as to simply be ignored. Though these views oppose one another, both reflect researcher driven views of how children respond to advertising. So ingrained are conventional views of children, that it becomes difficult to set aside what may amount to cultural presumptions and biases. The idea that children's perspectives may differ, at least in part, because the world they encounter is populated by people, situations and objects with which adults have little contact, is rarely acknowledged. From this world, they construct a reality that

is a rational, ordered and organized response to the condition of being a child (Fine and Sandstrom 1988; Goode 1986).

The notion of "constructed realities" which recognizes the contribution of the individual in creating a meaningful view of the world is a central premise of naturalistic inquiry (Hirschman 1985; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Kvale 1983; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Morgan and Smircich 1980; Thompson et al. 1989). Ontologically, the constructivist position asserts that reality is created in the minds of individuals. At all stages of the life-cycle, people are engaged in the creation of a meaningful view of the world and their relation to it (McCracken 1987). The meanings derived from or ascribed to objects, events or media are not intrinsic to the tangible entities themselves, but a product of the individual's interpretation. Reality is constructed by the perceiver in order to make sense of oneself, and to organize a belief system that will serve as a guide to action. The assumption that reality is not objective but rather subjectively defined, has important consequences for the design and conduct of research. Because each individual views the world from a unique vantage point, understanding of human phenomena must be grounded in the reality of how events and situations are subjectively lived or experienced (Thompson et al. 1989). Rather than discounting or disregarding children's subjective perceptions and experiences, these become the central focus of study.

How children make sense of their marketplace experiences is patterned by socially organized ways of perceiving and acting upon the world. Children of a given social and historical context have a set of interests and everyday experiences in common, that both distinguish and unite them. That children constitute a special audience as a consequence

of their cognitive limitations is widely acknowledged. That children share what might be considered a separate culture replete with norms, conventions and meaning that also affects their interpretation of advertisements is a more novel concept (Fine and Sandstrom 1988; Goode 1986; Young 1990). Communications scholars have adopted the notion of interpretive communities to differentiate media recipients along shared lines of interest and usage (e.g., Anderson and Meyer 1988; Lindlof 1988). An interpretive community is a specific audience group united by common experiences, affiliations and concerns that shape their interpretation of media content. Though the notion of interpretive communities has not yet been extended to investigations of children's media response, it offers an intriguing counterpoint to traditional models. Much like an interpretive community, a separate "kids' culture" generationally transmitted by children to other children may play an important yet unrecognized role in children's interpretation of advertising. Challenging conventional wisdom, a small group of social scientists and educators have argued that critical observation of children reveals an interpretive competence, creativity and honesty that is often masked in empirical research and broad based models of the socialization process (e.g., Goode 1986; Waksler 1986; Young 1990). As cultural outsiders, adults may have only limited access to, and superficial knowledge of, the norms and values that structure meaning creation. This is evident even in the gestures and words children use in day to day interactions. As adults, we may sometimes assume that we know what children mean, when, in fact, our perceptions are filtered through the lens of adult expectations, mores and common sense. From a marketing perspective, the potential for disaster in the design of communications certainly

exists; but, at a more fundamental level, our adult presumptions may lead to erroneous conclusions about what children intend and understand. The epistemological implication of this unique brand of ethnocentrism is that the research community has in large measure failed to encounter children as children, to enter their world and render it understandable from the perspective of the "natives".

Traditional advertising effects research implicitly reflects an objective orientation to ad processing and comprehension (Mick 1992). Meanings are contained in the message, and with the acquisition of sufficient decoding skill and experience with the genre, children eventually unlock the message housed within. Meanings are intrinsic to the message and intended by the advertiser. Research questions focus on children's emerging ability to extract key message elements and their subsequent persuasive impact (e.g., Liebert et al. 1977; Linn, de Benedictis and Delucchi 1982; Meringoff and Lesser 1980; Roedder et al. 1983; Ward 1972, 1980). Within the children's advertising literature, the objective orientation has wide appeal, both theoretically and pragmatically. Measurement procedures that establish children's accuracy or inaccuracy in decoding advertising messages are quite useful in grappling with traditional areas of concern and interest. Objective measures, easily developed and administered, can be used to mark and subsequently predict key developmental transitions. Concerns about miscomprehension as well as issues of fairness can be resolved; and the individual level impact of specific regulatory proposals can be assessed. However, this perspective tends to disregard receiver-based meanings. The child's point of view or subjective experience is lost, except where it happens to coincide with the researcher's. Close-ended questions

about ad claims and recall measures leave little room for respondent perceptions or reaction. What constitutes an appropriate response is determined a priori by researchers who adopt their own interpretations of ad content as the baseline and evaluate children's responses against it.

In contrast, the subjective orientation to advertising reception recognizes that children actively and selectively impose meanings to understand more completely, their world and themselves. These meanings are not fully bounded by the text of an advertisement but are negotiated through the lens of the child's prior experience, both personal and cultural (Jensen 1987; McCracken 1987; Mick and Buhl 1992). According to reader response or reception theory, meaning is not an immutable property of a text but the product of the text structure and the individual, interacting within a specific interpretive context (Allen 1987). When a child views a television commercial, the explicit message contents serve as a kind of blueprint to structure understanding, but text is by nature, incomplete. Coherent interpretation rests on the child's capacity to draw upon his(her) unique experiences and background knowledge to fill in gaps left vacant by the text (Collins 1983). Within the boundaries established by (his)her level of cognitive sophistication, the young viewer infers concepts, intentions, actions to make sense of even simple narrative messages (Anderson and Pearson 1984; Durkin 1989; Flood 1981; Trabasso 1981). Derived from the explicit contents of a message, these inferred relations may range from very simple, straightforward connections needed to establish coherence, to personalized elaborations that draw upon the receiver's self-

knowledge and experience (Alba and Hutchinson 1987; Mick 1992). According to this perspective, it is the child who is the final arbiter of advertising meanings.

Qualitative inquiry is particularly well suited for discerning the categories consumers use to interpret specific media and consumption experiences (Jensen 1987; Lannon and Cooper 1983; McQuarrie and Mick 1992; Mick and Buhl 1992). Consumer researchers have turned to qualitative modes of inquiry to study a wide range of consumer issues and phenomena. Drawing on ethnographic, semiotic and phenomenological traditions, these research efforts have helped to broaden the scope of consumer research and provide insight into substantive consumer behavior topics (e.g., Belk, Sherry and Wallendorf 1988; Hill and Stamey 1990; McQuarrie and Mick 1992; O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). Though each of these traditions is distinct, they share a fundamental interest in the perspectives of those being studied. The tie that secures these traditions within the qualitative paradigm is a direct concern with experience as it is "lived", "felt" or "undergone". The primary aim of qualitative investigation is to understand experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel or perceive it. Methods of inquiry are diverse, depending on the specific research issue. However, in-depth interviews or participant observation are widely employed in sociology, anthropology and education to understand people's perceptions of their everyday world. An interview methodology offers the opportunity to gain insight into the child's subjective experience of advertisements and the products they promote. It may represent the only means for attaining this type of understanding (Hughes 1989; Tammivaara and Enright 1986). Within the consumer literature,

researchers have focused their efforts on issues that impact adults. These kinds of approaches may also be fruitfully applied to furthering our understanding of how children perceive and evaluate marketplace stimuli.

Method

Overview

The primary objective of the first study was to develop a preliminary understanding of how children think about the relationship between ads they see and products they consume. A secondary objective of the initial investigation was to evaluate the viability of using depth interviews in research with school-aged children. Though consumer researchers have been critical of the use of interview methods in research with children, these criticisms are primarily focused on their use with very young children who are not yet able to articulate their thoughts and feelings clearly (Goldberg and Gorn 1983; Perrachio 1990). For many years, open-ended interviews have been widely used with school-aged children by educators and psychologists for both clinical and research purposes (Barker 1990; Bierman and Schwartz 1986; Garbarino and Stott 1989; Greenspan 1981; Hughes 1989; Parker 1984; Tammivaara and Enright 1986). The depth and breadth of children's responses quickly put to rest any concerns about their ability and willingness to participate in the research in a meaningful way. Twenty-two children, between the ages of seven and eleven were interviewed. Reflecting an "emic" approach, the interviews were loosely structured, open-ended and designed to discover significant meanings from the perspective of the children. Flexible in nature, the interviews encouraged children to recount their own product-related experiences. With few

exceptions, the children readily described a variety of experiences, both good and bad, with heavily promoted products. Specific ads and products were also introduced into the interview process to enhance understanding of the meaning creation process. The primary data for the study were the verbatim transcripts of these interviews. It is from these transcripts that conceptual relationships are suggested. Findings from this study served as input to the conceptual development and design of the experimental investigation as well as a source of a priori themes for subsequent qualitative inquiry.

Research Process

Emergent design. In this initial investigation, the research design was allowed to emerge or unfold, rather than constructed a priori. Given the existence of multiple realities, it is inconceivable that enough could be known ahead of time about children's subjective experiences to design the research well (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). A design emanating from the investigator's perspective would have seriously compromised the overall intent of the research inquiry. In these early phases, the inability to predict how children would respond and the substantive issues that would emerge, clearly called for an open-ended research approach (Lincoln and Guba 1985). When the research design is emergent, subsequent methodological steps are based on those that precede them. Data collection and analysis are not separate but interrelated processes (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987). Each interview takes into account all that has been learned before, and uses it to direct succeeding observations and interviews. Salient questions, provisional hypotheses and gaps are identified and pursued as the research progresses.

The systematic and sequential nature of data collection and analysis allows the researcher to capture all potentially relevant aspects of the phenomenon, while discarding those that are not repeatedly present in the data (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Corbin and Strauss 1990). As the inquiry proceeds, the design becomes more focused as salient concepts begin to emerge, hypotheses develop and theory begins to be grounded in the data obtained.

Field notes. Throughout the study, detailed field notes were written, summarizing the progress and conduct of the research. These field notes are of three types: additional data, methodological issues, and analytic memos. Detailed are initial theoretical assumptions, the project's emerging design and hypotheses, a summary of each interview both in terms of process and content, as well as preliminary interpretations of data. To minimize the potential impact of investigator bias, it is imperative that researchers specify in detail their assumptions, methodological decisions and the progress of their analysis on an ongoing basis. These field notes as well as the interview transcripts themselves, were reviewed on a weekly basis by two independent auditors. One of these auditors was a researcher with extensive qualitative research experience, the other was an expert in the field of consumer research. Their questions and reactions were noted, reviewed and discussed on a weekly basis throughout the data collection and analysis phases of the study.

Interviews and sampling procedure. Over the course of the study, twenty-two individual in-depth interviews were conducted. Informants were children between the ages of 7 and 11, many of whom were acquainted with the author through volunteer

school activities. This familiarity encouraged their participation and candor, while providing valuable background knowledge for interpreting the interview data. A purposive rather than a representative sampling procedure was used; in keeping with the aim of maximizing phenomenological insight rather than facilitating generalization across people (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Within the grounded theory framework, it is the representativeness of concepts not of persons that is critical. Since the ultimate aim is to build a theoretical account that specifies the nature of ad-consumption relationships, its forms, and consequences, samples are drawn which will best illuminate this relationship (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Informants were chosen on the basis of their ability and willingness to offer substantive insight into the ad-consumption relationship. The children were quite interested in the topic, knowledgeable and highly motivated to participate. The respondents seemed to enjoy the interviews thoroughly, particularly the product samples and the rare opportunity to watch television in school. Most approached the interviews as a fun experience yet with a seriousness of purpose in that they wanted to be clear and thorough in educating the nice but unenlightened adult researcher.

Eighteen of the participants were in fourth and fifth grades and four were in second grade. By this time, they are relatively articulate and have had substantial experience with the advertisements targeted at them. Initially, the study was to be centered on the experiences of older children (9 to 11-year-olds), however as patterns began to unfold, it became clear that comparative data was needed to begin to define the limits of the emerging explanation. Making comparisons helps the researcher to guard

against bias by challenging provisional concepts with new data. A basic operational strategy common to both grounded theory research and other forms of naturalistic inquiry, is to seek systematically the widest variation in the phenomenon under investigation. Through careful, ongoing comparison and the deliberate search for negative case examples, the consistency of provisional concepts is assessed (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Greater precision is achieved as comparisons warrant the subdivision or elimination of original concepts. Concepts and categories must earn their way into the emerging explanation through repeated observation and demonstration of their relationship to the phenomena in question. In this study, insight into the experiences of the younger children was initially sought as part of the researcher's obligation to seek negative instances or data that would be most likely to disconfirm the evolving theory (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). Though age-related differences began to emerge even with such a small sample size, the available evidence in this study provides little more than a suggestion of how these differences might be manifested.

The interviews ranged from 45 to 75 minutes, depending on the child's interest level and schedule. Several of these interviews were conducted over two sessions, which proved quite interesting as the children would often return wanting to add something they had "forgotten to say the other day". The informants were free to describe their reactions to particular ads and products and typically recounted a range of experiences. The format of the interview was flexible so as to allow informants to discuss their personal experiences, feelings and reactions. The interviews were rather loosely

structured so as to permit lines of inquiry that allowed the child's perspective to emerge (see Appendix A for a copy of the interview schedule). This type of interviewing has been adopted successfully in many studies with adults, but has rarely been used to study children's media reception. When children's advertising researchers have adopted an open-ended interview format, they have tended to apply predetermined coding schemes or theoretical models that mask children's substantive interpretations and conclusions (e.g., Bever et al. 1972, Rossiter and Robertson 1974; Ward et al. 1977). Adult models of thinking may influence the substantive conclusions that are drawn about children's assimilation and use of commercial content. In many studies of children's comprehension of television, the expressed or implied criterion for understanding is the adult explanation or the formal, literate meaning of a message that fully socialized members of a society might offer. Researchers have often used their own interpretation of televised content as a standard and evaluated children's perceptions against it (Anderson 1981; Dorr 1986). Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that children frequently "fail" to understand an advertisement the way an adult might. With this as the baseline, children's interpretations implicitly represent a flawed approximation to the reading an adult might provide, rather than an equally valid point of view. A loosely structured dialogue permits exploration of how children perceive advertisements, reflect on them and relate their contents to their own consumption experiences, ideas and knowledge.

Data analysis. Research conclusions are based on the verbatim transcripts of these depth interviews. These transcripts are the data from which conceptual

relationships are discovered, clarified and provisionally verified. The ultimate objective is the development of an inductively derived substantive theory, grounded in the reality of children's experiences with ads and products. The research findings constitute a rich, tightly woven explanatory theory of the phenomena under investigation, rather than a set of loosely related themes (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Systematic analysis techniques and procedures give the research process the precision and rigor necessary to establish the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Wallendorf and Belk 1989).

Coding, is the fundamental analytic process in grounded theory research (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1990). There are three major types: (1) open coding (2) axial coding and (3) selective coding. Open coding is the interpretive process by which data are initially broken down and conceptualized. Specific incidents, events and actions are compared, provisional concepts are identified and their properties dimensionalized. Open coding stimulates generative and comparative questions to guide subsequent data collection. In axial coding, conceptual categories are related to one another, and the relationships tested against data. In this phase of the analytic process, contextual factors, antecedent conditions and consequences are specified, enhancing the precision of the evolving explanatory network. Selective coding is the final step of the analytic process. In this phase, the central phenomenon or "core category" is identified and systematically related to other categories, validating those relationships and isolating those that need refinement. Ultimately, a richly textured, well-integrated theoretical formulation is derived, one that closely approximates the everyday reality it represents.

As the first phase of the research process, the findings of this preliminary study represent provisional concepts and categories, rather than a fully articulated grounded theory. The primary objective of the initial set of interviews was to learn what was relevant and irrelevant, significant and trivial in the realm of children's product related experiences. As is characteristic of the open coding phase of the analytic process, a variety of generative and comparative questions arose, guiding the conceptual development and design of studies two and three. The findings from this study provided a rich source of hypotheses, questions and issues for subsequent inquiry.

Research Findings

The original aims of this research were embedded in a theoretical perspective that views advertising as a vehicle for communicating cultural information and values. From an adult's perspective, children's advertisements seem to be filled with messages about friendship, acceptance, social status and family relationships. Part of the initial focus was to understand how children respond to these kinds of themes in commercial messages. Early interviews quickly revealed that these sorts of symbolic elements were not necessarily focal in children's minds. Questions about the characteristics or motives of the characters in commercials drew confused responses. However, the children seemed to have relatively strong opinions about the quality of particular advertisements and a clear understanding of their intent or purpose. When asked to evaluate the commercials, the children were able to focus on specific elements and describe how and why these features were effective or ineffective. What seemed to become clear was that children, of this age group had developed some pretty clear ideas about advertising as

a communications genre. Children naturally try to make sense of the world around them and advertising is very much a part of their everyday lives. By the time they reach the age of 10 or 11 most American children have seen tens of thousands of commercials. Evidence of this exposure was apparent almost immediately. Most of the children interviewed were well-aware of the content of recently broadcast children's commercials. With little invitation they sang jingles, pantomimed, mimicked dance steps, described in detail particular advertisements or even the evolution of entire ad campaigns.

Three consecutive strategies for the use of concrete props or stimuli, were adopted in this set of preliminary interviews (1) advertisements alone, (2) advertisements followed by product samples and (3) product samples followed by advertisements. In each of these cases, the stimuli were used primarily as tools to encourage children to draw upon their own experiences with ads and products, rather than as an end in and of themselves. These particular approaches arose as a consequence of the nature and substantive content of the children's responses in early interview sessions. Careful steps were taken throughout the research process to ensure that the interviews remained open and reflective of the child's perspective rather than being directed by the researcher through the interview structure. The evolution of the interview strategy was documented in extensive field notes kept throughout the research project.

Initially, children were shown advertisements and asked to describe what they noticed, liked, disliked and any other reactions they might have. This approach prompted a range of responses, focusing on the form and content of the ads as well as their perceived reliability. These early interviews provided a logical transition point from

the traditional research focus on prepurchase issues. Incorporating actual commercials within the interviews, provides a very different pattern of response than that obtained by asking children to talk about advertising in a more abstract sense, a strategy that has often been employed in research with children (e.g., Bever et al. 1975; Rossiter and Robertson 1974; Ward et al. 1977). With real ads, the children are exposed to all the excitement and creativity of the commercials in the context of the interview. The children respond to a concrete stimulus and all that it conveys during the interview. This is a positive feature of this approach in that it seems to force mixed feelings and uncertainty to the surface. When children talk about advertising in general rather than in specific terms, they tend to be fairly negative or skeptical. However, when they watch specific ads they may be singing along, laughing or enjoying the cinematic techniques that merge fantasy and reality. This approach to interviewing thus seems to help tap into both the positive and negative aspects of children's perceptions of advertising.

One of the things that was immediately striking in the first interviews was that children's responses to the advertisements seemed to have little to do with their perceptions or attitudes about the products advertised. Advertisements were perceived to be funny or stupid, silly or cool, but not necessarily, informative or uninformative. Rather than being evaluated as information sources about what a brand contains or how it works, ads were evaluated primarily in terms of their entertainment value. However, the initial interview strategy may have inadvertently encouraged children to reflect on the ad's capacity to amuse or entertain. By asking children to view and then "tell me what

you think" about specific advertisements, they are essentially invited to critique the ads on whatever dimensions they deem most relevant. To the extent that this interview strategy somehow directs the child's focus to creative aspects of the commercial, this approach may have inspired children to assume the role of art critic. To the extent that this is true, a more explicit focus within the interviews on the nature of the relationship between ads and products might be expected to deflect attention away from the ad's executional elements.

To highlight directly the relationship between advertising and consumption, products were introduced into the research process. Children were shown commercials and given products to sample, such as a cereal, fruit snack or cookies. With few exceptions, the children were highly involved, clearly enjoying the opportunity to try the products and talk about their reactions. The ad-product pairs typically prompted a number of comparisons to other products and commercials, prior experiences with a range of products as well as probable reactions of friends or parents. With the inclusion of product samples, the content of the interviews began to shift slightly, drawing more extensively on children's prior experiences both as consumers and shoppers.

Based on both children's advertising research and early studies of advertising-trial interactions, it was anticipated that children's reactions to specific brands would be affected by having seen advertisements for them (e.g., Goldberg, Gorn and Gibson 1978; Gorn and Goldberg 1982; Hoch and Ha 1986; Marks and Kamins 1988; Robertson and Rossiter 1976; Roedder et al. 1983; Smith 1993). Though it wasn't clear how this influence might manifest itself, it seemed reasonable to assume that children would

compare the performance of the product to claims made in the ad. However, when asked about their reactions to the products, their responses typically were only superficially related to advertised claims. Though most of the children did not have previous experience with these products, many spontaneously mentioned that they had seen commercials for them. They readily described the contents of these commercials, though their comments again tended to focus on the ad themes or execution rather than specific attributes of the product. The children talked at length about what they perceived to be funny or entertaining yet had relatively little to say about the brand's specific features or benefits as depicted in the ad. Their reactions to the brands, on the other hand, were dominated by sensory characteristics such as taste, texture, smell and appearance. What seemed to emerge was a picture of children's reactions to advertisements that had little to do with what they felt and believed about the products they consumed. It began to seem as though children view the products and the advertisements that promote them as quasi-independent entities. This pattern of findings seems to conflict with both intuition and previous research findings.

Both experimental and survey research provides clear evidence that advertising influences children's preferences and behavior. Children may alter their brand preferences as a consequence of advertising exposure, request the products they see advertised and choose advertised products over others when given the opportunity to do so (Goldberg and Gorn 1974; Goldberg et al. 1978; Gorn and Florsheim 1985; Gorn and Goldberg 1982; Robertson and Rossiter 1976; Roedder et al. 1983). Though children grow increasingly skeptical of advertising as they mature, they may still be persuaded by

specific advertisements they see or hear. Given this pattern of findings, the seemingly weak links between advertising and product related responses seemed puzzling. If children are persuaded by an advertisement they must have some expectations about the characteristics and benefits the product has to offer. However, it is not clear from existing research what the nature of these expectations are or how they might influence the interpretation of subsequent product experience. Though the dynamics of the advertising-consumption relationship have not been examined empirically, researchers have assumed that this relationship has a significant impact on children's perceptions and responsiveness to persuasive attempts. For example, it has been suggested that until children actually experience discrepancies between products as advertised and the products they obtain, they are unable to fully comprehend advertising's persuasive intent (Robertson and Rossiter 1974).

If, as the research community has assumed, children spontaneously compare their product experiences to the images conveyed by advertising, it is surprising that more of these direct comparisons were not evident in the interviews. On the one hand, it might be argued that these are implicit comparisons that somehow simply haven't been or can't be articulated in an interview format. Though this eventuality can't be ruled out entirely, a variety of questioning strategies have been employed to get at these relationships. Further, the children have been able to articulate their opinions and feelings on other equally difficult issues. Perhaps the more likely explanation is that these comparisons are neither complex nor specific. Children have expectations about the products they see advertised but they are simple and often tentative. In really listening to what the children

were saying about the brands, it became clear that they view advertisements as pretty straightforward messages, with common themes and exhortations. Questions about what the advertiser was trying to communicate drew initial responses such as "It has honey in it and they want you to buy it". When after viewing a commercial, children were asked what people could learn about the product by watching it, their answers reflected multiple versions of "not very much". A second grader was able to state it quite succinctly when he said "They all say they are the best since 1983. They all say they are good". For this young boy, his understanding of what advertising is, leads him to entertain only the most tentative kind of expectation. Given the nature of children's advertising and the thousands of commercials children come in contact with, his reaction makes a great deal of sense. Industry research suggests that young children understand products as entities, tending not to focus on specific attributes (Rust 1986). Product quality is not perceived in a dimensional fashion, either a product has it or it doesn't. This perspective may be due in part to the way advertisers communicate with children. Advertisements targeted to children are frequently entertaining and delightful, yet contain little more than vague and subjective promises of performance. Many of the claims made are as simple as "it tastes good", "it has honey", "it will make you strong", "everybody wants it", "you'll do anything to get it" or "eating ____ is an adventure" expressed in any number of entertaining and captivating ways. It would be difficult given the content of these ads to develop very fine-grained expectations about a particular brand. So, in that sense it is not surprising that children have difficulty relating their understanding of a commercial to their consumption experience. The experience of trying a product is dominated by

specific features, a cinnamon taste, how it smells, whether it contains sugar or marshmallows and how fast it gets soggy. The experience of the ad, on the other hand, occurs at the level of: is it good or bad entertainment?, is it fantastic or real?, and sometimes, can I relate to the characters or not?

The link between the brand conveyed through the imaginative and fanciful world of advertising and its reality in the everyday world, may be forged not so much on the basis of specific expectations about performance but on a much more diffuse basis, drawing extensively on the ad's affective appeal as well as the brand's overall perceived value. Given the content of these ads, it would be difficult to develop detailed expectations about a particular brand. In this situation, it is not surprising that children may approach advertising primarily as a source of entertainment and amusement rather than as a source of brand information. Further, most ads with which they come in contact, are for products in which they have little interest or likelihood of obtaining. Not surprisingly, the interviews suggest that these ads are neither likely to be ignored nor processed deeply in terms of the brand information they convey. Instead, they may best be characterized as a repository of cultural insight and expression to be mined by a young inexperienced audience, as well as a source of entertainment and diversion. The information centered perspective which has dominated the study of children's advertising response may not fully capture this possibility. Dominated by issues involving children's cognitive abilities and limitations, it fails to consider children's broader interests, motives and the everyday world in which advertisements are encountered.

Emerging from the initial interviews is a perspective of advertising that highlights its role as an entertainment vehicle as well as a source of brand communications. Though at best preliminary, the evidence does suggest that children's reactions to commercials encompass a rich, multi-dimensional array of form and content dimensions that are only tangentially related to the brand advertised. The older children, in particular, talked extensively about the creative merging of fantasy and reality within specific advertisements, the predictability of actors' portrayals, specific features that make a commercial funny or not, and specific strategies used to attract viewer attention and interest. What the implications of this finding are and whether it will continue to hold as more interviews are conducted remains an open question. Though researchers clearly recognize that children are entertained by commercials, this fact seems to have little bearing on how children's responses are conceptualized or measured. What is interesting is that this finding was not predicted or hypothesized a priori. The phenomenological interview allowed the discovery of what may or may not prove to be an important facet of the way children think about the advertising-consumption relationship. Adult models of the advertising-experience interaction would have suggested a much more information-centered consumer than children may turn out to be.

Using research techniques such as the constant comparative method, the significance of this type of result can be subjected to rigorous analysis and evaluation (Glaser and Strauss 1967). As major concepts and categories are developed, they are immediately challenged. Negative instances are sought and additional data are collected. For example, as the entertainment dimensions of advertising surfaced in the interviews,

a search for negative or qualifying evidence began. On a substantive level, questions were shifted to thinking about circumstances when executional elements might be less focal. From a methodological perspective, the interview structure was altered in order to minimize any directive influence of the structure itself. Rather than beginning the interviews talking about advertising, the interviews were instead oriented around children's experiences with products, their likes, dislikes and perceived involvement in shopping. Shifting the focus away from advertising to consumption was designed to illuminate how these kinds of products fit into children's lives.

To begin the interviews, children were asked about what they like to eat for breakfast. From this very simple question, a variety of topics were raised ranging from their feelings about bad product experiences to the impact of peers, siblings and advertising on what they know and like. They talked about their brand preferences and loyalties, how they learned about new products, why they liked brand name products more than generics, as well their own and others' criteria for choosing particular brands. They talked about using brand names as a cue to quality, how premiums might be used to promote sagging sales, loyalty to specific brands and store preferences. With the shift in focus, family members were mentioned more often. The children were well aware of their siblings' and parents' preferences as well as their criteria for choosing particular brands. They readily took family members into account in describing what they like and why. Within this group, there was a great deal of variation in terms of their level of participation in the family shopping and decision making. In a few cases, children were active participants in virtually all shopping expeditions. One fourth grader described how

he gets his own shopping basket and then goes off on his own to choose cereals, snacks, sodas and fruit drinks within loose guidelines that his mother has established. Most of the children interviewed indicated that they accompany their parents to the grocery store on a fairly regular basis, but that it did not necessarily mean they had substantial influence on the brands chosen. Whether and how their experiences as a shopper and consumer are influenced by advertising can not be determined on the basis of this preliminary study. However, these interviews did provide some initial insights worthy of further exploration. The understanding of how children interpret and evaluate advertising can only be enriched by a deeper appreciation of their role as both shopper and consumer.

One of the primary issues in the third wave of interviews, was to determine whether and how children would talk about advertising in the context of products they like and dislike. Without exception, children raised the issue of advertising's impact at some point during the conversation. Though consumption tends to be viewed as the most important source of information about frequently purchased packaged goods, family members, friends and advertisements were readily mentioned. In these interviews, advertising was viewed more critically. Though the participants discussed things that they thought were funny or entertaining about advertisements, they tended to focus as well on advertising's capacity to "trick" or "fool" people. Perhaps thinking about their product preferences first establishes a different mind set, a "logical or rational" young consumer. In their interpretations of ads, the children seemed to think more about the brand and what is said about it, than its capacity to entertain or its stylistic features. In

these discussions, the format of the commercial (e.g., technical sophistication, animation, music, camera angles) played less prominent a role. Instead, more attention was paid to whether the commercial did an effective job of portraying a product accurately. They made global comparisons between the quality of the product based on their own experiences and claims made about it in an ad. For example, comments such as "They say it's so perfect but I've tried it and it tastes yucky", were common. So while they did directly compare the commercial to the product, these comparisons tended not to be in terms of specific attributes but more in terms of their overall evaluations.

As the interview strategy evolved, the relative importance and attention paid to particular lines of questioning shifted. Given the focus on advertising's entertainment value evident in the initial data, subsequent interviews were designed to probe the meaning and limits of these findings. The use of concrete props proved to be a valuable tool in encouraging children to draw upon their own experiences with ads and products. While advertising's creative side remained a distinct focus of attention, the accuracy of the product portrayal began to assume a more prominent position in the third interview wave. When the children were asked to share their reactions in the context of products with which they had had substantial usage experience, their perspective shifted to incorporate both informational and executional dimensions. Use of the brands and ads within the interview aids the investigation of what appear to be context-dependent relationships. To explore the limits of the observed patterns further, initial interviews with younger children were conducted. Inclusion of the younger group was not planned at the outset of the study. However, the somewhat counterintuitive content of the early

interviews suggested the need for continued comparison and contrast.

Based on these preliminary interviews, there appears to be great diversity among the younger children, making any conclusions relative to the older group problematic. However, these age related differences promise to be quite interesting and worthy of further investigation. The younger children clearly recognize advertising's selling purpose yet use this knowledge in very different ways. The younger children seemed to focus to a much greater extent on the products and how they are portrayed in advertisements. They appeared to be much less focused on the execution of the ads, judging them instead on the basis of the product depicted. They were much less concerned about deception though this varied across children. Their evaluative criteria appeared relatively simple and their understanding of what advertising is, more vague. Clearly, these age related patterns warrant investigation. Interviewing the younger children is more difficult, yet it provides a counterpoint which helps to clarify how the older children view the relationships between products and advertisements.

Discussion

What has become apparent over the course of this study is that children between the ages of 7 and 11 recognize that advertisements have a clear purpose and mode of communication. The older children, in particular, can appreciate ads as entertainment but they know they are not real and can discount them on that basis. From the perspective of at least the older children, commercials don't provide much in the way of product information. They accurately recognize that kids' commercials have the capacity to entertain, bore or amuse them while saying little about the product or its features. They

know that commercials exaggerate product performance and can readily identify puffery in the context of an ad. They know that cereal can't make them powerful, strong or even feel good all day. By the time they reach the age of 10 or 11 children recognize that commercials are designed to attract their attention and pique their interest. They understand that advertisers employ all kinds of techniques to make their products appear inviting to children. They recognize when commercial messages are specifically created with a young audience in mind. They know that advertisements targeted to adults are much more likely to rely on real product information and specific nutritional claims to persuade. They expect children's commercials to be entertaining and are harshly critical when they are not.

Perhaps because they realize that commercials are more fantastic than real, they develop only relatively simple product expectations on the basis of advertising exposure. It was evident from the first interview that the children were taking great care to separate fact from fiction. Teasing out what was believable and what was not was clearly an important component of how the older children responded to what they saw. It appeared as though they were attempting to categorize ad elements as if to test out their new found understanding of advertising's unique communicative form. They may decide that they might like to try a product on the basis of an ad without having any real specific expectations.

While some of the children seem to be bothered by advertising's potential to deceive, others appear to be much less concerned. It is as if it is so obvious to them that commercials aren't real that they find it difficult to believe that anyone would accept

them as truth. However, they are generally quick to point out that they have had to learn on their own about how advertising works and that younger children might easily be fooled. Though all of the older children evaluated advertising in terms of its entertainment value, some of them were quick to describe what they perceived to be advertisers' "tricks". It was in relation to their descriptions of products they had prior experience with, where this became most apparent. They were quick to point out when an advertisement was making claims that they perceived to be false. In most cases their descriptions were derived from product experiences they had had outside the context of the interview. The children were clearly using their prior experience with a product to evaluate subsequent ads they came in contact with. Comparisons between a consumption experience and the claims made in an ad were more often made when a child had a strong dislike for a product. When a product proves to be disappointing, subsequent advertisements are judged rather harshly. These kinds of experiences promote a certain skepticism on the part of the young consumer. However, it is important to remember that many experiences children have with products are positive. Advertising seems to reinforce both positive and negative experiences. When a child likes a product, additional advertising may serve not only as a reminder to buy it but may actually promote greater positive feelings toward the product. Once a positive attitude is established, new advertising and additional product experiences may tend to be viewed with a less critical eye. Advertising may promote a kind of loyalty once a child has a positive experience with a product. There were several occasions when the children actually defended their preferred brands and talked about how the ads for competitors

were stupid or boring. It was both surprising and interesting that most of the children seemed to have relatively well-defined brand preferences.

The older and most sophisticated children were much more likely to separate their reactions to a product from their reactions to the advertisements promoting it. However, this separation was more readily accomplished when the product was liked rather than disliked. When a product is disliked, advertisements for it tend to be discounted as well. However, when a product is evaluated positively, advertisements seem to be judged on the basis of their capacity to entertain or amuse. Some of the children readily cited examples of products that they thought were much better than the advertisements seemed to show. However, these kinds of distinctions were reserved for the most articulate and experienced of the interviewees. Though the younger children are something of an enigma at this point, one thing that seems to clearly emerge is that their reactions to products and ads are much more closely linked. While older children may have the capacity to sort of distance themselves from the product in viewing an ad, younger children seem to judge ads more strictly in terms of product performance.

The fact that products may either confirm or disconfirm a child's expectations makes the issue of truth a complex one. When product experiences are negative, ads may be perceived as lies or simply mistakes. One second grader explained that a cereal company was unaware that its product was bad because no one who worked there had ever tasted it. What this example illustrates is that even when an ad doesn't mesh with experience, it doesn't necessarily mean that children will assume deliberate deception. The developmental literature indicates that the capacity to infer someone else's motives

may not be evident until the later elementary years. Though children can cite examples of being disappointed, it is important to remember that much of what they see is true at some level. Many of the products they consume, they like. When they see advertisements for these products and an animated character says they taste good, the children perceive the commercial to be true. If an advertisement says that a cereal contains honey and nuts and it has these ingredients, the commercial is considered true and accurate. The older children may evaluate the truth of an ad at multiple levels. For example, they may argue that an advertisement is true because the cereal does taste good but false in the sense that it can't make you more strong or powerful as it promises to do. The younger children, on the other hand, are much less likely to go beyond an initial global assessment of truth. Though advertisements are not always true, from the child's perspective they often are, at least at some level. Because much of what children see they perceive to be true, it is not surprising that they are not as obviously skeptical as they have the capacity to be. Children are not motivated to dislike the things they see advertised. Advertisements present products in a creative and entertaining way, and children are oriented to respond to them positively. Unlike adults, they are relatively unconstrained by economic realities, at least in terms of their desires and reactions.

Conclusions

This study seems to raise fundamental questions about how children perceive the relations between advertisements and the brands they promote. Rather than viewing advertisements simply as purveyors of brand information, these children revealed a broader, more-inclusive perspective that has executional elements at its core. While

characterized as "incidental" or "peripheral content" by researchers, entertainment in advertising is a focal issue among the consumers of these communications. The informants in this study serve as an important reminder that the perspectives of a young consumer may not necessarily conform to what an adult researcher might expect or consider. Among this group, advertising is at least as much a form of entertainment as a source of brand information. While these interviews provide initial insight into the meaning systems children draw upon in thinking about ads and products, this study is generative rather than conclusive. Conceptual linkages between the notion of entertainment arising in this study and extensive research on the attitude toward the ad construct within adult populations are examined in study two in the context of a causal design. As a precursor to that study, these interviews have identified the central role children's affective responses seem to play in their perceptions of ad-product relations. While limited in scope, this study highlights the value of considering children's unique perspectives in the design and conduct of consumer research.

CHAPTER 4

STUDY 2

Among social scientists and market researchers, qualitative inquiry has often been utilized to explore a new research topic, generate hypotheses and suggest directions for further study. While recent advances in consumer research and other social scientific disciplines demonstrate the value of a broader, more inclusive role for qualitative inquiry, its capacity to reveal unanticipated phenomena and relationships remains an undisputed strength. In the context of this project, fundamental yet not well-understood research issues were raised by the depth and character of children's responses in the initial study. Evident in children's descriptions was a fascination with the creative dimensions of advertising, its capacity to entertain and amuse, as well as its unique properties and freedoms as a form of discourse. Much of what they recounted focused on their feelings and thoughts about how ads are designed and executed quite apart from the brand itself. The content of these interviews, while providing initial insight into the categories of meaning children draw upon in thinking about advertising and their consumption experiences, also raised some very basic questions. In particular, the interplay of cognitive and affective factors in children's advertising response, the role of executional factors in shaping the responses of different age groups, the meaning of entertainment per se, as well as the mediating properties of product trial, emerged as directions for continuing investigation and analysis. While a single investigation can not address all

of these issues, experimental methods are particularly well-suited for further testing and refinement of emergent hypotheses. One of the primary advantages of a hybrid research design is the opportunity it provides to capitalize on the unique strengths of individual research methods in learning about a single substantive phenomenon. Qualitative study allows the researcher to strip away (his)her own perspectives and those of the scholarly community, to enter into a phenomenon from the perspective of those who live it. Exposed to all the richness and complexity of these experiences, this mode of inquiry directs the researcher to that which is relevant and compelling. In this case, it was the affective dimensions of advertising response and how children draw upon them that began to push investigation in a new and unanticipated direction. The initial study helped to identify global patterns that might have otherwise escaped notice. Evidence emerged that children were evaluating ads primarily in terms of their entertainment value rather than as information sources about what a brand contains or how it works. Relatively weak links between their reactions to ads and products were observed, calling into question both theory and intuition. Findings from the initial study suggest that the link between the brand as portrayed in advertising and its reality in the everyday world, may be forged not on the basis of specific expectations about performance but on a much more diffuse basis, drawing extensively on the ad's affective appeal. However, very preliminary evidence indicates that this pattern may differ across age groups. While older children tended to draw extensively on executional elements in framing their response, the younger children seemed to focus to a greater degree on the product and the validity of the advertisement's portrayal. Though these issues have not been addressed within a trial

context, this pattern introduces inconsistencies into current conceptualizations of children's advertising response. While the findings of the preliminary study suggest that the relationship between ads and product consumption may be tenuous, experimentation provides the opportunity to isolate and test important causal relationships. The experimental investigation was designed to examine the precise nature and strength of the linkages between children's affective reactions to ads, brand perceptions and attitudes within the context of product consumption.

Despite long standing interest in the nature and effects of consumers' affective reactions to commercial stimuli within consumer research, these issues have received little attention in the conceptualization and measurement of children's responses to advertising. Within consumer research, there is a long and well-established stream of research addressing issues such as the determinants and impact of consumers' ad attitudes, the role of emotion or feelings in persuasion and the consequences of peripheral ad processing (e.g., Batra and Ray 1986; Burke and Edell 1986, 1989; Lutz 1985; Lutz, MacKenzie and Belch 1983; Mitchell and Olson 1981; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch 1986; Shimp 1981). Despite this history, traditional approaches to the study of children's advertising response make the implicit assumption that cognitive factors adequately capture the meaningful aspects of how children process advertisements. Children's affective reactions to advertisements tend to be ignored or perceived as inconsequential (Wartella 1984). However, it has become increasingly clear that the cognitive and affective dimensions of persuasion for adults are interrelated rather than discrete (Burke and Edell 1989; Edell and Burke 1987; MacKenzie et al. 1986).

Both pragmatic and conceptual considerations suggest that the relationship between children's cognitive and affective reactions to advertisements warrants careful study. Conceptually, advertising response patterns observed in adult populations can not be extrapolated to a young audience uniquely engaged in learning about what advertising is and how it works. Models of adults' advertising response do not incorporate the developmental constructs needed to explain response variation among age groups. While these theories provide the critical foundation for further study, they were neither designed nor intended for examining advertising effects among children. Further, though extensive research effort has been focused on the nature and effects of consumers' attitudes towards advertisements, the impact of entertainment per se, has received scant attention. Research within the "viewer response profile" (VRP) tradition assesses consumers' affective reactions to ads on a set of multidimensional descriptive rating scales (Lastovicka 1983; Schlinger 1979). In these investigations, entertainment emerges as a stable, analytically-derived underlying factor. However, its relationship to other measures of advertising effectiveness has not been addressed systematically. The emergence of entertainment as a central conceptual theme in the preliminary study suggests that this construct may be an important explanatory factor in the realm of children's advertising response. Ads were assessed not simply in terms of their likability but their entertainment value. Among the older children, these judgments were relatively sophisticated, frequently drawing on a number of form and content dimensions. The complexity and detail that characterized children's comments seems to suggest that alternative models of the persuasion process bear consideration. It may be that an

entertaining execution enhances persuasion through its ability to capture attention and enhance brand recall, thereby facilitating entry into the child's evoked set, irrespective of any brand-specific expectations.

From a more pragmatic perspective, a special emphasis on children's affective responses is warranted due to the frequency of emotional or image-based appeals in advertising targeted at a young audience. Children have become an increasingly important market segment in terms of absolute size, spending power, and purchase influence (McNeal 1987). Their receptivity to promotional efforts is of direct interest to advertising professionals, public policy makers, manufacturers and academic researchers.

The purpose of this study was to examine how advertising may affect children's interpretations and performance evaluations when combined with direct brand experience. Using products and advertisements specifically designed for and marketed to children, this study investigates how children assimilate information gleaned from their consumption experiences and advertising. In addition, the relationships among children's affective reactions to commercials, brand beliefs and attitudes are explored in the context of pre-trial advertising as well as situations where the child has had the benefit of direct experience with the brand.

This investigation extends experimental research on children's responses to advertising by (1) focusing on the potential impact of product experience and (2) incorporating affective as well as cognitive response variables. While research on advertising-trial interactions has suggested that advertising influences adults' subsequent

product experiences only when the experience is novel or ambiguous, these conditions may not hold among children (Hoch and Ha 1986). Without the cognitive sophistication and generalized skepticism that guides adult processing, it is anticipated that advertising may influence children's evaluations of their product experiences even when those experiences provide unambiguous evidence about product quality.

Conceptual Background and Hypotheses

Beyond the borders of children's advertising research, there are a number of research literatures that can be brought to bear in understanding the interrelated effects of advertising and product experience on consumers' brand responses. In addition to the transformational advertising and hypothesis-testing models, research on the nature and impact of consumers' ad attitudes is particularly relevant for examining children's affective responses to ads and relationships among key indicators of advertising effectiveness. This stream of research provides the theoretical basis for examining whether children's liking for an ad and its perceived entertainment value play a significant role in shaping their brand attitudes within a consumption context. A second, and perhaps more basic issue, involves whether children integrate their interpretation of commercial claims with their experientially based impressions when they judge a brand's performance. In recent years, there has been increased interest in understanding how adult consumers incorporate information from advertising and product experience in forming brand attitudes and purchase intentions (e.g., Marks and Kamins 1988; Smith 1993; Smith and Swinyard 1982, 1983, 1988; Wright and Lutz 1993). While consistent with the hypothesis-testing model introduced by Hoch and Ha (1986), this literature

draws on attitude rather than information processing theory to explain the differential credibility of information obtained through advertising versus product trial. This research provides a useful starting point for thinking about the differential roles advertising and product experience may play in shaping children's brand related beliefs and attitudes.

The Effects of Advertising and Product Trial on Brand Perceptions and Attitudes

In recent years, marketing and consumer researchers have focused increased attention on the interaction of advertising and product use in shaping consumers' brand perceptions and attitudes (e.g., Deighton 1984; Hoch and Deighton 1989; Hoch and Ha 1986; Marks and Kamins 1988; Wright and Lutz 1993). Though the effects of the advertising-experience interaction have long been of interest within the consumer satisfaction literature (e.g., Olson and Dover 1979; Oliver 1980), it is only recently that researchers have considered the issue of how consumers draw on these sources in learning about the marketplace (e.g., Hoch and Deighton 1989; Hoch and Ha 1986).

Advertising versus product trial. One of the primary conceptual foundations for recent research on ad-trial relationships is the "integrated information response model" (IIRM) proposed by Smith and Swinyard (1982). This model compares consumer response to advertising and product experience, and suggests that, in most cases, advertising exposure creates only tentative or weakly held brand-related beliefs and attitudes. From an adult's perspective, advertising is understood to be a partisan source of information. Experiential evidence, on the other hand, is presumed to reflect objective reality. According to the model consumers both recognize that the advertiser presents

a biased case, and act upon this knowledge by discounting ad claims. As a consequence, they form "lower order" or tentatively held beliefs and attitudes about the brand's characteristics and performance. In contrast, consumers who have direct experience with the brand, form much stronger, confidently held brand-related beliefs and attitudes. These "higher order" responses are based on the enhanced credibility or trustworthiness of judgments based on personal experience. While an ad may be suspect, rarely do consumers question the validity of their own experiences. The IIRM suggests that when a brand's important features can be assessed, trial based beliefs and evaluations will dominate those gleaned through advertising exposure. When the credibility of information in the environment varies, consumers' specific expectations about a brand's performance are a function not only of the strength of their beliefs but of their confidence in those beliefs as well (Smith and Swinyard 1982, 1983).

Wright and Lutz (1993) have extended the IIRM model by differentiating between search and experience attributes in their analysis of ad-trial relationships. Experience attributes are those features of a brand that can only be detected through consumption (e.g., flavor, texture, smell). Search attributes, on the other hand, are those characteristics that can easily be assessed prior to purchase (e.g., price, size, ingredients). This is a particularly important distinction to consider in the domain of frequently purchased packaged goods where experience attributes may dominate. Within this domain, Wright and Lutz (1993) have shown that product trial leads to confidently held beliefs about a brand's experiential properties, while having little impact on consumers' perceptions of its performance on search dimensions. Their findings also

suggest that product trial may dominate advertising's influence in shaping consumers' perceptions about a brand's experience attributes.

In this study, packaged food products primarily targeted and marketed to children represent the domain of interest. These products as well as the ads designed to promote them are dominated by experiential attributes and claims. Within this domain, product trial is particularly informative, providing straightforward, diagnostic evidence about unambiguous experience attributes. Advertising, on the other hand, is less credible or trustworthy and likely to be discounted in the face of experiential evidence. In essence, this study focuses on a substantive domain in which theory would suggest that advertising has relatively little impact, except when considered in isolation.

Where the credibility of information and truth value are at issue, age differences are likely to occur. Extensive research within the children's advertising literature would suggest that older children are much more critical of advertising than their younger counterparts (Bever et al. 1975; Blatt et al. 1972; Rossiter and Robertson 1974; Ward 1972; Ward et al. 1977). Given the skepticism apparent among older children, they are likely to readily distinguish between the credibility of advertised information and that obtained through direct product experience. While the ad may produce weak, tentatively held expectations about the brand, product use will result in stronger, more confidently-held beliefs and attitudes, replicating the findings observed among adult consumers (Marks and Kamins 1988; Smith and Swinyard 1983; Wright and Lutz 1993). However, younger children may not make the distinction between advertising and experiential evidence so readily. Though their experiences clearly provide pertinent evidence

regarding product quality, advertisements are not necessarily treated as inherently untrustworthy or uninformative. The IIRM suggests, that, in most cases, advertising exposure creates "lower order" beliefs about brand benefits as a consequence of consumers' inclination to discount commercial claims (Smith and Swinyard 1982). There is little evidence to suggest, however, that young children are particularly critical of ad claims. Among this group, ads may simply represent an alternative source of brand information rather than a lesser, or less trustworthy source than the product itself. While children may rely heavily on their direct experiences in forming their brand preferences, this does not necessitate that advertised information be discounted.

- H1a: Older children's (10-11 year-olds) brand related beliefs and attitudes are more confidently held when formed on the basis of product trial than on the basis of advertising exposure.
- H1b: Among younger children (7-8 year-olds), belief and attitude confidence scores are not significantly different when formed on the basis of product trial than when formed on the basis of advertising exposure.

In addition to the issue of advertising versus product trial, there are a number of interesting questions involving the combined impact of advertising and experience on children's brand related responses. One of the central issues within this area has centered on advertising's capacity to frame the interpretation of subsequent brand experience (Deighton 1988; Hoch and Ha 1986; Levin and Gaeth 1988; Marks and Kamins 1988; Puto and Wells 1984).

Ad as a frame on product experience. If older children's brand related beliefs are relatively tentative and weakly held when based on advertising exposure, the question becomes one of determining whether these expectations exert any impact on persuasion

when the child has the benefit of direct experience with a brand. In the decision making literature more generally, evidence of framing effects within a prepurchase context is considerable. Researchers have shown that ads or brand labels can frame how consumers perceive and evaluate subsequent product information (e.g., Allison and Uhl 1964; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; Wright and Rip 1980). In a trial context, though ad-based beliefs are weak, a framing effect may occur whereby advertising directs the consumer's attention to specific, and presumably favorable brand attributes during the use occasion (Levin and Gaeth 1988). Wright and Lutz (1993) have shown, for example, that advertising exposure prior to product use shifts consumers' attention toward the brand's experiential properties. Hoch and Ha (1986) proposed that beliefs formed on the basis of advertising exposure have the capacity to frame the interpretation of a product experience, through a hypothesis-testing mechanism. Based on exposure to an ad, consumers form tentative beliefs or hypotheses about a brand that they subsequently tend to confirm through product trial (Deighton 1984; Hoch and Ha 1986; Levin and Gaeth 1988). While the processes are not as well understood, transformational advertising researchers also argue that advertising may shape the interpretation of a consumption experience through more affective means (Puto and Wells 1984). The experience of using the brand is transformed, made more enjoyable, or exciting as a consequence of repeated advertising exposure. From this perspective, classical conditioning may offer the most useful perspective for understanding underlying response processes. While theory reveals a number of mechanisms through which framing effects might arise, empirical investigation has identified key contextual constraints.

Among an adult population, framing effects seem to occur primarily in one of three circumstances (1) when the trial experience is ambiguous or open to multiple interpretations (Hoch and Ha 1986), (2) when the consumer lacks the motivation or requisite knowledge to assess brand performance (Hoch and Deighton 1989), or (3) when the information gleaned from advertising is inconsistent with that acquired through product trial (Marks and Kamins 1988; Olson and Dover 1979; Smith 1993). According to the hypothesis-testing model, when experiential evidence is unambiguous and hence diagnostic, advertising has little incremental impact on consumers' beliefs and attitudes. Whatever impact advertising might have on the interpretation of product experience is swamped by unambiguous experiential evidence. It is only when the consumer has difficulty judging the experience that the ad derived information might be drawn upon to help make sense of the experience. Subsequent research has tended to support this conclusion (Levin and Gaeth 1988; Wright and Lutz 1993). Drawing on both the IIRM model and information integration theory, Smith (1993) proposed that advertising's capacity to frame the experience is also limited if both the ad and the use experience provide consistent information. While the averaging model of information integration predicts that the effect of any one source of information is inherently dependent on all other sources of information available to the consumer, the differential credibility of ad versus trial based information strongly affects the weights assigned to each. When the ad and the experience provide consistently favorable information, consumers perceive the trial experience as providing the more trustworthy information and form confidently held beliefs as a consequence. Ad claims, on the other hand, are perceived to be less credible

and consequently given little weight when consumers develop their overall impressions of the brand. Smith (1993) reported findings consistent with this hypothesis. When the ad and the trial experience were consistently favorable, consumers exposed to an ad/trial sequence and those exposed to trial alone did not differ with respect to their brand related beliefs or expectations. Only when an obvious discrepancy existed between ad claims and the brand's actual performance, did advertising have a significant impact on consumers' perceptions. Olson and Dover (1979) examined this issue in the context of the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm and also found that lower order beliefs formed by advertising can influence subsequent experience-based product perceptions when the trial experience and ad are obviously inconsistent with one another. In a closely related study, Marks and Kamins (1988) focused on framing effects in the context of highly versus slightly exaggerated ad claims. Though the effects were weak, they did find that consumers exposed to a slightly exaggerated ad followed by trial experience had more positive purchase intentions than those exposed to trial alone. No differences were observed between these groups with respect to beliefs or attitudes. Differences between trial and ad/trial groups were much more pronounced in the context of highly exaggerated ad claims.

Collectively, the evidence indicates that advertising has little impact on consumers' interpretation of their product experiences, except when the experience is difficult to judge or when the product is substantially different than the ad portrayal. Otherwise, experiential evidence is more trustworthy, salient and diagnostic of product quality than advertised information. As a consequence, beliefs formed on the basis of

advertising are likely to exert little influence on consumers' interpretations or evaluations. However, it is important to recognize that these issues have been conceptualized within an information centered perspective of what advertising is and how consumers respond to it. The diminished influence of advertising in a trial context is predicated on its relatively low credibility as a source of insight about brand performance. From this perspective, advertising's role is defined purely in terms of its capacity to convey brand information. That advertising may influence the consumption context through more affective means that have little to do with specific performance claims is not captured by these models. The IIRM is based on a model of attitude that presumes affect is derived from cognitive components, specifically beliefs and belief confidence. The hypothesis-testing paradigm draws on information processing concepts such as confirmatory biases to conceptualize advertising's impact. Only the transformational advertising paradigm expressly incorporates affective elements, but underlying processes remain largely unspecified and untested. Without specifically examining both the affective and cognitive impacts of advertising, it may be premature to conclude that advertising exerts little influence in a consumption context.

In the realm of children's responses to ads and products, both the proclivity to accept ad claims and the ability to integrate multiple information sources across age groups bear consideration. Relative to the younger children, older children are much more likely to recognize the differential credibility of information gleaned through direct product experience versus advertising. To the extent that children focus primarily on brand related claims in an advertisement, older children are more likely to be skeptical

of the claims and base their judgments on readily available experiential evidence. Much like adults, when a product experience provides unambiguous information, advertising has little impact on older children's brand perceptions or attitudes because it lacks credibility. According to both information integration theory and the IIRM, when the ad and the product provide consistently favorable information, older children will weigh trial information more heavily in forming their impressions of the brand.

H2a: Older children exposed to an advertising-product trial sequence and those who rate the brand on the basis of a trial experience alone do not differ significantly in measures of their total expectancy¹ or brand attitudes.

Derived from existing theory, this hypothesis makes two important assumptions. First, it presumes that children's affective responses to ads have little impact when product quality is easily assessed through product trial. Second, it assumes that children evaluate ads primarily in terms of the information they provide about the brand, and that older children are likely to view ads critically within the exposure setting. However, while older children recognize the differential credibility of ad versus trial based information, they may not draw upon their knowledge of advertising's purpose without a reminder to do so (Brucks et al. 1988). Also suggestive are the findings of the preliminary study, which revealed that older children read ad messages in terms of their entertainment value, accuracy, underlying objectives, and creative strategy rather than simply as a set of brand claims. Plausibility enters the older child's judgment, perhaps creating an enhanced sensitivity to the ad message, relative to younger children. So, while the literature on advertising-trial interactions indicates that advertising is likely to exert little influence in a trial context, the findings of the preliminary study as well as recent

research on children's cognitive responses, seem to suggest that an alternative pattern in which advertising does exert influence is possible, even among the older children.

Among the younger age group, it is important to consider whether they even have the capacity to integrate ad and trial based information. Information integration theory has been applied to a number of issues within developmental psychology including children's perceptual judgments (e.g., numerical quantity), moral judgments, perceptions of groups, and social attribution (Anderson 1980). One of the general findings of this work is that young children (below age 6) consistently combine stimulus dimensions according to rules, such as averaging and adding. This research indicates that even the younger children (7-8 year-olds) in this study, should have the capacity to combine advertised claims and information gleaned through product trial in a meaningful way. With the capacity to integrate advertised and experience based information, it is likely that the younger children will do so. Unlike the older children, advertising is not likely to be viewed skeptically, and as a consequence may play an important role in guiding the interpretation of subsequent experiential evidence. Since younger children tend to judge complex stimuli on a holistic basis, the ad may create diffuse, positive impressions about the brand, rather than specific expectations that tend to be confirmed through product trial. In the case of children's advertising, it is often the ad claims rather than the experience that is open to multiple interpretations. Ad claims are often cast in terms of broad, relatively vague assertions that can easily be confirmed through trial. To the extent that the ad portrays the brand in the best possible light, children may be predisposed to interpret the experiential evidence favorably. Without the skepticism to

discount exaggerated ad claims, younger children may develop a somewhat inflated view of the brand. If the brand's actual performance is not obviously discrepant from the ad claims, an assimilation effect is likely to occur (Marks and Kamins 1988). As a consequence, children exposed to an ad/trial sequence should evaluate the product more positively than those exposed to trial alone. Research on change in meaning also suggests that early information may create an impression that influences the interpretation of subsequent information (e.g., Beckwith and Lehmann 1975; Cooper 1981; Nisbett and Wilson 1977).

H2b: Among younger children, exposure to an advertising-trial sequence has a facilitative effect on measures of their total expectancy and brand attitudes, relative to product trial alone.

Product trial as a frame on ad interpretation. While advertising may exert a significant impact on children's beliefs and attitudes when it precedes product trial, it may have little impact on when it follows a consumption experience. As a precursor to trial, the ad has the capacity to direct children's attention to those attributes that reflect most positively on the brand. In essence, the ad provides the child with suggestions about how to think about and judge their experience with the product. In some sense, the advertisement may act as an aid to the child, by providing a blueprint for evaluating the brand. When, on the other hand, advertising follows trial it may have relatively little impact on children's brand perceptions. For young children, consumption experience is not only the most readily available source of product information available but the easiest source to comprehend and judge. Sensory data is easily interpreted, it is more salient than an advertisement, and more likely to be readily recalled (Tybout and Scott 1983).

Children can easily judge their experience, according to their own, perhaps simple and idiosyncratic, criteria. When they subsequently encounter an ad, they may have little incentive to reassess what are likely to be confidently held perceptions about the brand. While the ad may facilitate the evaluative process when it precedes trial, it may actually complicate matters when it follows trial. To the extent that the child evaluates the product according to his(her) criteria, the ad may introduce features that have not yet been considered. Rather than reinterpreting what (s)he believes based on the trial experience, specific claims within the ad may be considered in a more cursory fashion than they are in a typical prepurchase context. The greater salience of sensory judgments may simply overshadow advertised claims. Unless the experience is obviously discrepant from the ad portrayal, in which case counterarguments might be stimulated, the ad may receive relatively little attention or weight in the child's product evaluations. A similar pattern has been reported among adult consumers, though the conceptual foundation has rested primarily on the differential credibility of advertisements and product trial rather than the greater salience and ease of interpreting the product experience. According to the IIRM, once a consumer has acquired direct experience with a brand, it is difficult for advertising to alter his(her) perceptions. Based on personal experience with a brand, adult consumers tend to form confidently held beliefs that are resistant to change (Marks and Kamins 1988). Since advertising results in only lower-order beliefs, it is unlikely to dislodge higher-order brand perceptions based on trustworthy, sensory data (Tybout and Scott 1983). Even adults tend to draw heavily on their own sensory based evaluations in forming attitudes about products. Primacy effects observed in a variety

of situations, whereby early information is both attended to more heavily and better remembered, would also support the hypothesized differential impact of advertising when it precedes as compared to when it follows product trial.

H3: Children exposed to a product trial-advertising sequence and those who rate the brand on the basis of a trial experience alone, do not differ significantly in measures of their total expectancy or brand attitudes.

Relationships among Affective Responses to Advertising and Brand-Related Responses

The second major goal of this research was to explore what role affective reactions to advertisements play in determining children's brand-related beliefs and attitudes and how this role might change when children have direct experience with a brand. If advertising does have the capacity to frame the child's consumption experience, research on consumers' "attitude toward the advertisement" (A_{AD}) is useful in suggesting a more affective route whereby these effects might occur.

Attitude toward the ad. Advertising researchers, with both theoretical and applied orientations have a long standing interest in understanding the impact of consumers' affective reactions to advertisements on persuasion. Among industry researchers, research findings from the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) copy testing project have generated substantial debate regarding the validity of consumers' general liking for an ad as a measure of its effectiveness (Haley and Baldinger 1991; Miller 1991, 1992). In the ARF study, consumers' overall reaction to a commercial, or whether they liked the spot was identified as the best single predictor of advertising effectiveness. Neither persuasion nor recall, traditional measures of ad success, were highly correlated with likability. This result seems to suggest that the utility of "likability" measures may bear

reconsideration and rediscovery in current advertising practice. Though research firms have raised questions about the validity of ARF conclusions on methodological grounds, the impact of "ad likability" remains a topic of considerable interest and debate (Miller 1992).

Among academic researchers, interest in the determinants and consequences of consumers' affective reactions to commercials is substantial. In particular, researchers have focused investigation on the impact of consumers' ad affect on other indicators of advertising effectiveness. Within the last two decades, "attitude toward the ad" (A_{AD}), an affective construct reflecting a consumer's favorable or unfavorable response to a particular ad has assumed a prominent role in advertising theory (Mitchell and Olson 1981; Shimp 1981). Now widely recognized as an important mediator of advertising's effects on brand attitudes and purchase intentions, A_{AD} has been investigated in over sixty articles in the marketing and consumer research literatures since 1981 (Brown and Stayman 1992). Issues such as the determinants of consumers' ad attitudes, the conditions in which these attitudes have relatively strong effects, their role in determining ad outcomes, and, more recently, A_{AD} 's relationship to feeling responses have each been the subject of substantial investigation (e.g., Burke and Edell 1989; Gardner 1985; Lutz 1985; MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch 1986; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; Miniard, Bhatla and Rose 1990). Though the contributions are many, never have the persuasive consequences of children's attitudes toward advertisements been explored. Further, very few studies have focused on A_{AD} 's capacity to influence brand beliefs and attitudes in a trial context (Smith 1993; Wright and Lutz 1993).

The A_{AD} construct is a general attitudinal response, defined here as "a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion" (Lutz 1985). This conceptual definition views A_{AD} as an affective or evaluative response to a commercial stimulus, rather than a cognitive or behavioral response (Lutz 1985; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch 1986). Within this conceptualization, distinctions between consumers' evaluative reactions to an advertising stimulus and purely affective responses such as feelings are treated as antecedents rather than indicants of the more general A_{AD} construct (Batra and Ray 1986; Edell and Burke 1987; Madden, Allen and Twible 1988). This definition also differentiates between viewers' general attitudes about advertising and their responses to a specific advertisement at the point of exposure. Rarely have the implications of this distinction been considered in investigations of children's advertising response. Children's broader attitudes about advertising are implicitly assumed to be a good predictor of their situation-specific responses. However, both recent research (Brucks et al. 1988) and the findings from the preliminary study reported here indicate that the nature of children's responses shift depending on whether they are talking about advertising in general or responding to a particular commercial message.

While A_{AD} may exert its strongest influence on other response variables at the time of ad exposure, its effects on consumer behavior may not be purely transitory (Lutz 1985). These attitudes may persist over time, influencing consumers' brand evaluations, even in the context of direct experience with the product (Burke and Edell 1986; Smith 1993).

The dual mediation model. One of the most prominent directions in recent research on A_{AD} has focused on testing the causal relationships among A_{AD} and other measures of advertising effectiveness, including brand cognitions, brand attitude and purchase intentions. Four alternative models of A_{AD} 's mediating role on brand attitudes and purchase intentions were first proposed and tested by Lutz, MacKenzie and Belch (1983) and MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch (1986). This initial work provided support for one of the models, the "dual mediation hypothesis" which has subsequently proven robust to factors such as consumers' level of involvement and processing objectives (Gardner 1985; Homer 1990). In a recent meta-analytic test of the dual mediation model, Brown and Stayman (1992) reported strong support for the overall model.

Five constructs form the basis of the dual mediation model (1) ad cognitions ($Cog_{A_{AD}}$) - consumers' perceptions of the advertising stimulus, including executional factors, (2) brand cognitions (Cog_B) - consumers' perceptions of the brand advertised, (3) attitude toward the ad (A_{AD}) - consumers' affective and evaluative reactions to the ad, (4) brand attitude (A_B) - consumers' affective reactions to the brand and (5) purchase intentions (I_B) - consumers' perceptions of the likelihood that they will purchase the brand in the future (Lutz, MacKenzie and Belch 1983). Figure 1 depicts the hypothesized linkages among these constructs (MacKenzie et al. 1986). Of particular interest in the context of this study, are three structural relationships ($A_{AD} \rightarrow A_B$; $A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$; and $Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$). These relationships provide the basis for examining whether and how A_{AD} 's role shifts when children are exposed to brand information through product trial as well as advertisements.

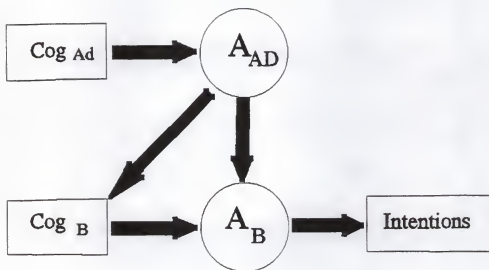


Figure 1. The Dual Mediation Model of Advertising Response.
Mackenzie, Lutz, and Belch (1986).

In a pretrial context, the dual mediation model posits both a direct effect of A_{AD} on brand attitude as well as an indirect effect via brand cognitions. The direct effect is a one-way causal flow from A_{AD} to A_B through which affect generated by an ad is transferred directly to the advertised brand. A_{AD} may also influence brand attitude through a more indirect two-step mechanism: (1) $A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$ and, (2) $Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$. According to the model, the first step occurs because consumers' affective reactions to an ad may foster message acceptance. The more positively consumers feel about the ad, the more receptive they are to its content. The second step, ($Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$) is based on the traditional hierarchy-of-effects framework, whereby brand attitudes are determined by brand beliefs. Evidence for the indirect path has been mixed. While a number of studies have reported support for the first ($A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$) step (Homer 1990; MacKenzie et al. 1986; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989, Miniard, Bhatla and Rose 1990), support for the significance of the second step is mixed. Weak links between consumers' brand cognitions and attitudes ($Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$), may be accounted for in part by consumers' adoption of a peripheral processing strategy, whereby executional factors receive disproportionate attention (MacKenzie et al. 1986; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). The findings from a recent meta-analysis of A_{AD} 's effects suggest that brand cognitions do have a significant, yet not considerable influence on brand attitudes in a prepurchase setting (Brown and Stayman 1992). The strength of this linkage can be expected to increase substantially when examined in the context of product trial.

In this study, a slightly modified version of the dual mediation model was used to examine children's responses. In addition to the three basic constructs outlined above,

the model was expanded to include three secondary constructs, prior brand attitude (PA_B), entertainment (Entertain), and ad information (Ad Info). Figure 2 depicts the revised specification of the model. Prior brand attitude was incorporated because the stimuli used in this study consisted of television commercials broadcast over the three major networks. Though children had minimal direct experience with the brands themselves, it was highly possible that they had previously been exposed to advertisements for them and, as a consequence had formed an initial attitude toward the brand.² It was expected that these prior attitudes toward the brand would affect children's current brand evaluations in an advertising setting but would have little impact when they also had the opportunity to try the product, as a consequence of the greater salience of the concrete experience.

- H4: When children are exposed to both advertising and product trial, the impact of their prior attitudes on current brand attitudes is reduced relative to its impact in an ad-only setting.

The specification of entertainment and ad information as distinct constructs represents a refinement of the original multi-dimensional ad perceptions component (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). Here, an attempt is made to separate children's perceptions of a commercial's entertainment value from their assessments of the ad's utility as a source of brand information. While entertainment was expected to be a strong predictor of children's overall attitude toward the ad, perceptions of an ad's information value might be expected to influence both ad attitudes and perceptions of the brand itself.

Among adult consumers, A_{AD} has been shown to be an important mediator of advertising response in a variety of research contexts. Researchers have shown that A_{AD}

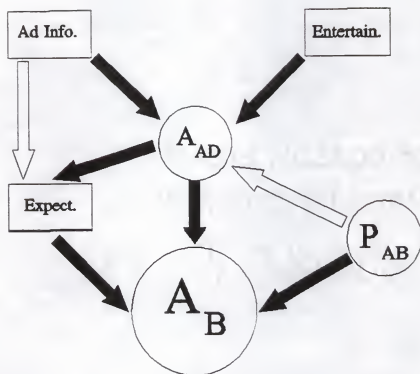


Figure 2. Modified Specification of Dual Mediation Model.

is a mediating influence of advertising's effects on consumers' brand attitude when they (1) direct attention to either the content of a message or its execution (Miniard et al. 1990), (2) engage in central or peripheral processing (Gardner 1985), (3) possess product knowledge or lack expertise (Homer 1990), (4) are involved on either a cognitive or affective basis (Park and Young 1986) and, (5) are exposed to either print or broadcast media (Homer 1990). Common to these investigations is a focus on A_{AD} 's role in a pre-purchase context. All of these investigations have employed research designs that provide consumers with product related information exclusively through advertising exposure. Recently, Smith (1993) and Wright and Lutz (1993) have extended this research stream by investigating A_{AD} 's ability to retain its mediating role when consumers have direct experience with a brand.

Direct effects of A_{AD} on brand attitude. Within the context of children's advertising response, little if any, empirical evidence exists regarding A_{AD} 's role in the response process. From a theoretical perspective, developmental models utilized in consumer research offer little insight into the affective dimensions that may influence children's responsiveness to a particular message or brand. The centrality of this construct within advertising theory as well as its empirical validation across a wide variety of research settings, however, clearly suggests that this construct may play an important yet not necessarily isomorphic role within the context of children's advertising response. The relationships between A_{AD} and subsequent indicators of advertising effectiveness are well established within a pre-testing context. The fifth hypothesis serves as a replication and extension of these findings to a young audience and establishes

the baseline against which subsequent trial based issues might be examined.

H5: When children receive brand information solely through advertising, A_{AD} is positively associated with brand attitude.

Given that A_{AD} influences children's perceptions and attitudes toward a brand in an advertising context, the question arises as to whether it retains its mediating role when children have the opportunity to gain direct experience with a product.

Traditionally, researchers have conceptualized A_{AD} as a relatively transitory, situationally bound attitudinal response, generated at the time of exposure and expected to have its strongest impact within the exposure setting (Lutz 1985). However, recent research has yielded seemingly conflicting evidence regarding a more enduring role for these affective reactions within the persuasion process (e.g., Chattopadhyay and Nedungadi 1992; Burke and Edell 1986). Under what conditions affective reactions to advertisements impact subsequent consumer behavior is not yet well-understood. The transformational advertising literature suggests that affect generated in response to an ad may affect how a consumption experience is subsequently construed and evaluated (Puto and Wells 1984; Wells 1986). The information response model, on the other hand, seems to suggest that consumers' affective reactions to an ad may be of little consequence once a consumer has actually consumed a product. According to this model, trial based beliefs are not only more salient than perceptions based solely on advertising, but also held with greater confidence. As a consequence, they should play the primary role in shaping brand attitudes (Marks and Kamins 1988; Smith and Swinyard 1982, 1983). Research in the area of attitude-behavior relations also indicates that attitudes formed on the basis of direct experience are more strongly held and more accessible than those

formed on the basis of indirect experience (e.g., advertising) alone (Fazio 1986). Though the role of A_{AD} in ad-trial interactions was not specifically addressed by either Hoch and Ha (1986) or Levin and Gaeth (1988), both seem to suggest that when a product experience is unambiguous, it swamps the effects of advertising. Collectively, the evidence clearly suggests that A_{AD} plays a diminished role within a trial setting. Smith (1993) offers empirical support for this proposition in the context of a new, unfamiliar advertisement and brand.

Current theory suggesting a limited role for A_{AD} within a trial setting rests on assumptions that may not hold in the context of children's advertising response. First, the literature seems to rely on a central processing perspective on the origins of A_{AD} , to the exclusion of more peripheral mechanisms (Lutz 1985). While researchers have shown that A_{AD} 's antecedents are both cognitive and affective, the theoretical rationale for A_{AD} 's diminished role is based primarily on cognitive dimensions, most notably ad credibility.³ However, to the extent that A_{AD} is reflective of consumers' responses to executional elements, it is not clear that product trial necessarily blunts its effect. Theoretical arguments in support of a diminished role for A_{AD} , implicitly presume a weak or un compelling execution.

With the exception of Smith (1993) and Wright and Lutz (1993), there is little direct empirical evidence that assesses whether A_{AD} retains its mediating role in the context of consumption. While incorporating affective dimensions broadens current models of ad-trial relationships, neither of these studies may fully capture the influence of A_{AD} , particularly those dimensions that derive from the executional elements of the ad.

Both utilized relatively pallid, experimenter created print ads to assess A_{AD} 's impact on consumers' beliefs and attitudes. To the extent that A_{AD} is determined by consumers' cognitive evaluations of message claims (Park and Young 1986), as well as executional elements, some residual impact of ad affect might be anticipated. However, its influence within a trial context was not substantial in either of these studies. Wright and Lutz (1993) reported that consumer's liking for an ad had a positive impact on their receptivity to claims made about search attributes but had little impact on their acceptance of claims made about experience attributes. In the latter case, the direct sensory evidence provided through trial was found to overpower residual advertising effects. This evidence supports earlier findings indicating that advertising has little impact in a trial context, except in limited circumstances. However, neither of these studies utilized advertisements which have the capacity to draw the consumer in, entertain and amuse. Fanciful, fast-paced television commercials designed for children may represent an endpoint of a stylistic continuum, diametrically opposed to the types of advertisements used to date in research on advertising-trial relationships. On the basis of these studies, it is difficult to determine whether consumers' affective responses to advertising are really inconsequential within a consumption setting.

Young children may allow their affective reactions to an advertisement to color their perceptions even when presumably more diagnostic information is available. Among this age group, advertising is not automatically assumed to be less credible than trial use. More likely to judge ads on the basis of whether they promote an appealing product in a fun and exciting manner, they may allow their reactions to the ad spill over

onto the product experience itself. Young children's A_{AD} may derive both from their responses to the ad's executional characteristics and the initial appeal of the product, to a greater extent than message based elements such as the credibility of the claims or the advertiser. This group may not so readily differentiate between the ad and the brand. If they like the brand, then the ad is also likely to be perceived positively. Young children tend to judge ads and brands on a more holistic basis than older children (Roedder 1981; Rust 1986; Ward 1972). Rather than evaluating a product on the basis of multiple specific features, they may form more global impressions about the ad and the brand that it promotes. When the ad is funny, silly, or otherwise engaging it may create positive feelings and reactions which lead to more positive evaluations of the brand irrespective of whether the child has had the opportunity to sample the product or not. With little incentive to discount the ad or its contents, it may set the stage for a positive experience.

As children mature, they may be expected to begin to reflect on the utility of information contained in the advertisement and modify their responses accordingly. Among older children, A_{AD} is likely to be shaped by the perceived credibility of the ad, the advertiser and advertising in general as well as the executional characteristics of the ad (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). When evaluations of the ad and its claims are the primary source of brand information available, their direct role in shaping brand attitude is substantial. However, children's affective reactions to the ad may pale in comparison to more confidently-held trial based beliefs, which are likely to play the dominant role in determining children's brand attitudes. So, while A_{AD} may exert a substantial direct

influence on older children's brand attitudes in a prepurchase setting, it is likely to have little impact in the context of product trial.

H6a: When younger children are exposed to advertising prior to product trial, A_{AD} 's ability to mediate advertising's effects on A_B does not differ from its impact in an ad-only setting.

H6b: When older children are exposed to advertising prior to product trial, A_{AD} 's ability to mediate advertising's effects on A_B is reduced relative to its impact in an ad-only setting.

When trial precedes advertising, A_{AD} may be expected to have little impact on children's brand perceptions or attitudes, irrespective of age group. In this situation, the trial experience will direct children's attention to the features of the brand, and attitudes are formed on that basis. Subsequently encountered advertising, however entertaining or exciting it might be, does not have the capacity to alter these higher-order, sensory based brand evaluations. Children may like the ad or think it is funny, but these affective reactions have little consequence when they occur after attitudes have already been formed.

H7: When children are exposed to advertising following product trial, their affective reactions to the ad (A_{AD}) are not associated with their brand attitudes, irrespective of age group.

Indirect effects of A_{AD} on brand perceptions and attitudes. While the direct influence of A_{AD} on brand attitude has been well-documented in a prepurchase context, support for its indirect effect via brand perceptions has been mixed (Homer 1990; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989; MacKenzie et al. 1986). The first stage of the indirect process ($A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$), has received strong empirical support indicating that consumers' affective reactions to an ad aid message acceptance. The more positively consumers feel

about the ad, the more receptive they are to claims about performance. The second stage of the indirect process ($\text{Cog}_B \rightarrow A_B$), is based on the traditional assumption that brand beliefs determine brand attitudes. Though this stage often fails to reach significance in individual studies, the findings of a recent meta-analysis indicate that brand perceptions do have a significant though small influence on brand attitudes in prepurchase settings (Brown and Stayman 1992). The strength of these relationships may be expected to change, at least among the older children, when advertising is combined with product trial.

When older children learn about a product solely through advertising, their reactions to the ad itself are likely to influence their perceptions of the brand. With little other information to guide them, their responses to the ad, both its executional characteristics and its perceived credibility may shape more specific expectations about the brand. Since brand perceptions formed on the basis of ad exposure are rather weakly-held, they may easily be swayed by an appealing or engaging advertising execution. While claims made about a brand in the context of a commercial are unlikely to be taken at face value and simply accepted as evidence about its performance, positive reactions to the ad may make the child more favorably disposed to accept message claims. Sensitive to the exaggeration and ambiguity of advertising claims in commercials targeted for them, older children may be hesitant to accept ad claims but may yet be persuaded by advertisements that are affectively engaging. The more positively they feel about the ad, the more receptive they are to its content. When advertising is the sole source of information, A_{AD} may be expected to play a causal role in shaping children's

brand perceptions ($A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$), replicating previous findings among adult populations. Affect generated by an advertisement influences the favorability of children's cognitive reactions to the brand. However, the brand perceptions children form in response to the ad may be relatively weak, solidifying only after product trial. Not only are the claims not perceived to be highly credible so that links to the brand are tenuous, but it may be that the older children tend to respond to the ad in terms of its entertainment value rather than purely as brand information. This reasoning is consistent with Gardner (1985) who found that beliefs were a stronger predictor of brand attitude under a 'brand' than a 'non-brand' set. So, while A_{AD} may be strongly associated with brand perceptions, these weak expectations may have little causal impact on brand attitude in an ad-only setting.

H8a: When older children receive information from advertising, A_{AD} is positively associated with brand perceptions ($A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$), but these perceptions are independent of brand attitude ($Cog_B \nrightarrow A_B$).

Among younger children, a similar response pattern can be expected between ad affect and brand perceptions. Favorable reactions to the ad are likely to exert a positive influence on children's brand perceptions because a younger child may not clearly differentiate between their reactions to the ad and their reactions to the brand. However, in this case, these perceptions may have a direct influence on the brand attitudes children ultimately form. Unlikely to consider credibility issues, young children may readily accept what the advertiser claims, forming their brand attitudes on the basis of what they see depicted.

H8b: When younger children receive information from advertising, A_{AD} is positively associated with brand perceptions ($A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$), and these brand perceptions positively influence brand attitude ($Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$).

In prepurchase settings, children's affect toward an ad thus has the capacity to enhance or diminish children's acceptance of message content, irrespective of age group. Whether A_{AD} retains its ability to shape brand perceptions when children also have the benefit of trial experience will depend on the sequence in which the ad and the product are encountered. When advertising precedes trial, A_{AD} may still have a positive influence on children's receptivity to ad claims. Since A_{AD} is formed prior to product trial in this situation, there is little reason to expect that its influence on children's acceptance of brand claims would necessarily decline. Among the older children, the facilitative effect of ad affect on persuasion may actually be enhanced in an ad-trial context. Whereas purely ad based expectations are relatively weak among older children, having little impact on indicants of persuasion like brand attitude, they may be more powerful when reinforced through product trial. Unless the experience is clearly discrepant from what the ad suggests, children's positive reactions to the ad may lead to greater receptivity to ad claims, which in turn are reinforced or confirmed through a favorable experience. This rationale is similar to the hypothesis testing mechanism except that it suggests that advertising's effect is affectively driven and, as such, may occur even when the experience is presumably unambiguous. Soda is perceived to be fizzier and cereal sweeter, as a consequence of advertising that is entertaining or funny.

- H9: When older children are exposed to advertising prior to product trial, A_{AD} is positively associated with brand perceptions ($A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$), and these brand perceptions in turn positively influence brand attitude ($Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$).

While children's affective reactions to an ad may play a role in shaping their brand perceptions and attitudes when advertising precedes trial, these responses will have little

impact when ad exposure follows product trial, irrespective of age group. Product trial serves as a salient, easily interpreted basis for assessing product performance. The beliefs children form as a consequence of direct product experience serve as the primary basis for their brand attitudes. Since higher order beliefs are already formed when advertising is encountered, it loses its capacity to enhance product perceptions. Among the older children, trial experience may also serve as the cue needed to remind them to enlist their cognitive defenses, further reducing the ad's capacity to influence brand perceptions. While the relationship between A_{AD} and brand perceptions is likely to be quite weak, beliefs formed on the basis of trial experience are expected to be a strong predictor of brand attitude. When children have direct experience with the brand's salient features, resulting beliefs are strongly held, providing a potentially powerful basis for attitude formation.

H10: When children are exposed to advertising following product trial, ad affect has little impact on the formation of brand beliefs ($A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$), but trial based beliefs are positively associated with brand attitude ($Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$).

Figure 3 graphically depicts hypothesized relationships among key variables of interest, for each experimental conditions. Black arrows denote relationships hypothesized to be statistically significant.

Method

Design and Subjects

A 2 x 4 mixed experimental design was used to examine the joint effects of advertising and product trial on children's cognitive and affective responses. Two age groups, second (7 to 8-years-old) and fifth (10 to 11-years-old) graders, participated in

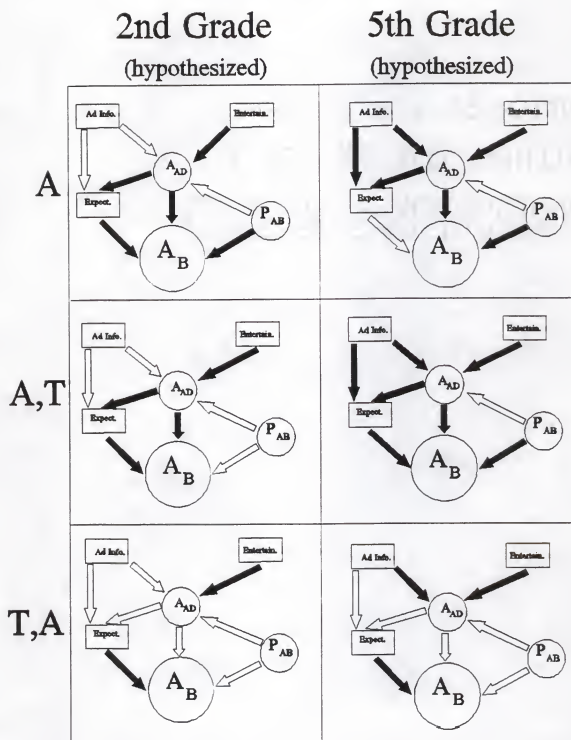


Figure 3. Hypothesized Relationships Among Ad Affect, Brand Perceptions, and Attitudes

the study. The content of brand related information these children were exposed to was manipulated on a within subjects basis. By manipulating the source of information and the sequence of exposure, four experimental conditions were created: (1) ad only, (2) trial only, (3) ad followed by trial, and (4) trial followed by ad. Each of the children participated in four experimental sessions, conducted over a five week period. A total of seventy-two children participated, recruited from public elementary schools reflecting diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. Two age groups, second graders (mean age = 7.4 years) and fifth graders (mean age 10.4 years), were equally represented in the study. Previous research indicates that these age groups share general preferences for commercial content, yet differ both in terms of their general responsiveness to advertising and in their understanding of persuasive messages (McNeal 1987; Roedder 1981; Ward et al. 1977; Wells 1965). However, even the younger children have the capability of generating the simple inferences required to understand and evaluate advertised claims.

Procedure

Each subject participated in four experimental sessions, conducted over a five week period. All sessions were held at the school sites and carried out on an individual basis. On the first day, the child was introduced to the experimenter by his(her) teacher. After establishing a rapport with the child, the interviewer then escorted the child to a private office at the rear of the school library. To begin, children were given the following brief instructions:

I'm talking to kids like you (in 2nd/5th grade) to find out what you think about the different kinds of commercials and products that you see on TV. I don't work for the people that make these products or commercials, so it won't bother me if you don't like something. This isn't like school work- there are no right

or wrong answers. I just want to know what you think. To do this, we are going to play some games. For the first game, I'm going to ask you how much you like different foods by using this set of stamps.

Following this, the interviewer showed the child an ink pad and set of five stamps with cartoon smiley/frowning faces imprinted on them, similar to those traditionally used in marketing research with children (e.g., Neelankavil, O'Brien and Tashjian 1985; Roedder et al. 1983; Wells 1965). The specific meaning for each of the stamps was explained, illustrated and the child was given the opportunity to try each one. (Appendix B contains a sample questionnaire and specific instructions for all scales used in the study). Then, the child was asked to rate a total of twenty brands on this scale as each of the package fronts were displayed sequentially by the experimenter. These initial brand attitude measures were collected for a group of children's cereals, snack foods and candies. Embedded within this group were the four experimental brands used in the study. Many children spontaneously remarked that the game was a lot of fun, thus serving as a very effective and highly motivating warm-up exercise for the first day. After this, the researcher turned to the experimental task, in which the child was exposed to advertising, product trial or a combination of the two. In the advertising only condition, the child was shown a videotape with two filler ads followed by the target commercial (shown twice) with ten seconds of black in between. After the first exposure, the child was told "This is the commercial I really wanted to talk to you about. If it's okay with you, we are going to watch it one more time". In the trial condition, the child was provided with the target brand (in its original packaging) and given four minutes to sample it. Subjects in the two ad-plus-trial conditions then received either

a product sample or exposure to the target commercial, whichever they had not yet received. During presentation of the stimulus materials, the child's facial expressions and spontaneous comments were recorded by the experimenter. After all stimulus materials were presented, dependent measures were collected in the following order irrespective of experimental condition (1) prior ad exposure, (2) A_{AD} , (3) ad perceptions, (4) brand familiarity, (5) brand attitude and confidence measures, (6) brand perceptions, evaluations and confidence, (7) product satisfaction, and (8) brand attitude for filler brands. Once these measures were completed, the child was thanked and escorted back to his(her) classroom. On average, the procedure took 20 to 25 minutes to complete, with a slightly longer time frame for the first session. After completing the final experimental session, children were asked a series of questions about their grocery shopping involvement, brand preferences, TV viewing preferences and general attitudes about advertising. Children were then thanked and given a prize as a small token of appreciation. Formal permission to conduct the research was obtained from district-level administrators, principals, teachers and parents.

Substantive Domain

The substantive domain of interest for this investigation are food products specifically advertised to children. More than 50% of television advertisements targeted for children promote snacks, cereals, pre-sweetened drinks or candy. Though a variety of appeals are used to promote children's products, informational appeals stressing ingredients or nutritional benefits are relatively rare. More common are advertisements that rely on indirect appeals to psychological states, associations with established values

or unsupported assertions about product quality (Barcus 1980). Advertisements for food products frequently contain claims about a product's texture or composition (e.g., "doesn't get soggy", "creamy-crunchy", "sugary sweet"). Approximately 90% of these commercials also contain claims that represent opinions about product quality that are highly subjective and difficult to verify (e.g., "the great American chocolate bar", "1001 taste adventures", "fun and wacky"). These advertising claims are highly attractive, plausible yet difficult to dispute directly. In the context of children's advertising, it is often the ad rather than the product experience that is vague or ambiguous.

Independent Variables

Age. Conceptually, the two age groups selected capture important developments in children's processing and of advertising, typically occurring between the ages of 7 and 10 (Roedder 1981). Children in this age range are likely to differ in their understanding of persuasive intent, information processing of commercial messages, and attitudes about advertising (e.g., Adler et al. 1980; Raju and Lonial; Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Roedder 1981; Ward et al. 1977; Young 1990). Younger children are more likely to: (a) believe ad claims, (b) hold more positive attitudes toward advertising, and (c) experience difficulty separating fact from fiction in the context of persuasive messages.

The age range from 7 to 11 seemed most appropriate from a methodological perspective as well. Given the objective of integrating research findings across three studies, it was important to select age groups who would have both requisite skills and facility with the interview process. Seven year olds were selected because much younger children might experience difficulty in comprehending questions and verbalizing their

thoughts, feelings and reactions (Gorn and Goldberg 1983). This age group has also had extensive experience with the types of ads and products selected for study (e.g., snack foods, pre-sweetened cereals, candy). To ensure continued interest in and use of the product domain, 10 to 11 year-olds were chosen as the older age group. In pretesting, both second and fifth graders reported that they watched both Saturday morning and weekday afternoon television on a regular basis, key commercial slots for these products. Not surprisingly, both age groups also reported frequent consumption within these product categories.

Information. Through extensive pre-testing and review, four ad-product pairs were selected for study. Four advertisements were selected from a large pool of food commercials broadcast during Saturday morning and weekday afternoon time slots in the three months preceding the investigation. Immediately eliminated from the pool were all advertisements containing premium offers (e.g., contests, giveaways, prizes), program characters acting as endorsers (e.g., Fred Flintstone, Bugs Bunny) and brands that required cooking or additional preparation (e.g., Kids' Cuisine frozen entrees, Eggo frozen waffles). From this reduced pool of approximately forty commercials, a two step pretesting procedure was utilized to select the final target ads. First, the entire pool of ads was shown to a group of four adults who had advertising research and/or agency experience. They were asked, as a group, to eliminate commercials from the set that were unrepresentative of the genre with respect to the execution style used, the product category advertised, the quality of the resolution, or the quantity of information conveyed. Approximately fifteen ads were eliminated from the set, at this stage. Then,

the remaining ads were shown to eighteen fourth grade children who were asked to rate both the commercial and the brand on a number of dimensions including, familiarity, liking, comprehensibility and prior experience. The final four ads were selected on the basis of the following criteria (1) children's prior direct experience with the advertised brand was low, (2) multiple product categories were represented within the set, (3) variation existed among the children in terms of their attitudes toward the specific ads and brands promoted and (4) the ads as a set reflected the continuum found in children's ads in terms of quantity of the information provided. To meet these criteria, market leaders for whom experience is virtually universal were eliminated early in the process (e.g., Cheerios, Chips Ahoy). The ad/brand pairs ultimately selected for inclusion were (1) Keebler Pizzeria Chips, (2) Sodalicious Fruit Snacks, (3) Smarties Chocolate Candy (imported from Canada) and (4) Double Dip Crunch Cereal. Each of these advertisements incorporated both search and experience based claims. Both animated and non-animated executions were represented. Subject to the constraints outlined above, every effort was made to draw on a sample that would well-represent the domain of food advertisements targeted at children. Appendix C contains both the text and a brief description of each advertisement.

Children were given the opportunity to sample the products, as well as look at or read the product package. Products marketed to children frequently contain characters or other cues designed to remind and reinforce advertising themes (e.g., Keller 1987).

Stimulus set. To assess the generalizability of response patterns across product categories and advertisements, an additional four level within subjects factor was

examined in the analysis. One of the difficulties in previous research on advertising-trial interactions is that these effects have typically been examined in the context of a single product category, confounding constructs such as ambiguity with product class. To enhance the external validity of the findings, four ad/brand stimulus pairs were utilized in this study (Lynch 1982). A latin square design was utilized so that the effect of the stimulus replicates could be tested. No significant differences were anticipated across advertisements or product categories.

Dependent Variables

The primary dependent variables in this study were brand perceptions, brand attitudes, belief and attitude confidence. With the exception of scales to assess children's general attitudes about advertising or brand attitudes, few established measures exist within the academic literature to examine children's responses to marketing stimuli (e.g., Macklin and Machleit 1989; Rossiter 1977; Wells 1965). Constructs such as A_{AD} , brand related beliefs and confidence have not been measured within the context of children's advertising response. As a consequence, measures were developed and pretested for use in this study. Given the potential difficulties inherent in developing valid and reliable measures for use with young children, a number of preliminary steps were taken to ensure that the measures were meaningful and easily understood by the children. Two industry researchers were contacted who had extensive experience in designing questionnaires for use with children between the ages of six and twelve. They sent sample questionnaires and provided helpful critiques on early versions of the items developed for this study. Drawing from both the psychology and education literatures,

an extensive review of attitude and belief measures used in research with children was also conducted. This search was designed to learn about how psychometric scales for children are constructed and administered. Studies investigating a wide range of topics were consulted including, but not limited to: children's attitudes about reading, self-perceptions, academic motivation, attitudes about smoking and school-related attitudes. This proved to be quite useful in guiding the design of measures where none existed. All measures were pre-tested extensively with second and fourth grade children to ensure that they understood the measures and could use them effectively.

Brand beliefs. For each of the four ads, a list of attributes was generated based on claims made either visually or verbally within the commercial. From these claims, a series of sentence stems were created such as "it tastes like soda" (for the Sodalicious fruit snack). Children were then asked to match this stem to one of four options ranging from "I really believe" to "I don't believe at all" to create the sentence that most closely reflected their belief. The four belief options in the form of sentence strips were laid out on a table. Then, the child was handed the sentence stem for each attribute one at a time and asked to make the most appropriate match. All of these materials were read to all participants so that any reading difficulties would be overcome. The task proved to be quite simple and straightforward to both age groups. Belief scores were summed across all experience attributes.

Brand attitudes. Children's attitudes toward the brands were measured initially using five-point facial scales as suggested by Wells (1965) and modified by Roedder et al. (1983). For the second administration of the brand attitude measure a five-point star

scale commonly used in industry research was utilized in combination with two likert items assessing the brand on like/dislike and good/bad dimensions. Coefficient alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of these items ($\alpha = .94$). Reliability estimates were remarkably consistent across age groups for the measures used in this study. As a consequence, alpha values are reported for the total sample except where age-related differences were evident.

Belief and attitude confidence. There were no established measures for children's belief and attitude confidence within the consumer literature. Among adults, confidence is typically measured by asking consumers how certain they are of their belief or attitudinal judgments on seven-point scales ranging from "extremely uncertain" to "extremely certain" (Marks and Kamins 1988; Smith 1993; Smith and Swinyard 1983, 1988). This type of measure is far too complex for children to interpret successfully. Instead, a measurement approach developed by Ginosar and Trope (1980) and modified for use with children was adopted. In their study, adult subjects indicated their confidence in a series of probability judgments on a seven-point rating scale anchored by "My answer is a guess" to "I am completely confident in my answer". Using the sentence strip approach outlined above, a four-point scale was created ranging from "I really, really think so" to "I really just guessed." The overall belief confidence score was summed across individual attributes.

Attitude toward the ad. Four questions tapping the following dimensions were used to assess children's ad attitudes: liking, excitement, feelings while viewing and good/bad. Using both pictorial cues and verbal labels matted on large cardboard strips,

subjects were asked to point to the most appropriate response. Their responses to these four questions were summed to obtain an overall attitude score ($\alpha = .88$).

Ad perceptions and attitudes about advertising. Children's general attitudes about advertising were measured using a slightly modified version of Rossiter's (1977) scale. This four point yes-no scale allows subjects to choose between two levels of affirmation and two levels of negation. In this study, a question mark neutral category was added to ascertain the level of uncertainty present among this group. Since the scale had been used only once with children as young as second grade (Riecken and Samli 1981), all items were verbally administered to both age groups. In this study, the alpha value was .67 for the fifth grade sample and .55 for the second grade sample. Though researchers have reported some empirical difficulties with the unidimensionality of the scale (Macklin 1984), it has been shown to capture meaningful differences within the target population (e.g., Bearden, Teel and Wright 1979). To measure ad perceptions a series of items derived from Barling and Fullager (1983) and Schlinger (1979) were used to develop measures for "entertainment" and "ad information". Children's ad perceptions were measured on five-point yes-no scales similar to those employed by Roedder, Sternthal and Calder (1983) and Rossiter (1977). Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .69$ for "ad information" and $\alpha = .77$ for "entertainment".

All scaled items were verbally administered to each participant to eliminate potential difficulties that might have arisen as a consequence of differing literacy levels.

Analysis and Results

To assess the validity of the expectation that the older children were more generally skeptical about advertising than the younger children, subjects' scores on Rossiter's (1977) attitude toward television commercials scale were compared. As anticipated, the older children did report more negative attitudes than the younger children ($X_{2nd}=22.94$, $X_{5th}=18.52$, $t=3.75$, $p < .001$). Consistent with prior evidence, these findings represent an important backdrop for considering children's more situation specific reactions.

Effects of Advertising and Product Trial on Brand Perceptions and Attitudes

The analysis of variance model (ANOVA) was used to test planned comparisons associated with the first three hypotheses.

Advertising versus product trial. The first hypothesis suggests that older children's brand related beliefs and attitudes are more confidently held when formed on the basis of product trial than ad exposure, while no differences were expected among the younger group. The belief confidence measure used to test this hypothesis was the mean of the attribute-specific scores for each product category. Attitudinal confidence was measured on a four-point scale relating to how sure children were about how much they liked the test brands. The appropriate cell means and relevant F-test results for the planned comparisons needed to test H1 are reported in Table 1.

The data indicate that product trial led to greater belief and attitude confidence among both the older and the younger children relative to advertising exposure (Belief Confidence: $F=38.59$, $p < .0001$; Attitude Confidence: $F=81.00$, $p < .0001$). However,

Table 1

Advertising versus Trial: ANOVA Results.

	BELIEF	*BELIEF CONFIDENCE	A _B	A _B CONFIDENCE
AD ONLY	2.91	2.68	3.70	2.49
TRIAL ONLY	2.97	3.35	4.23	3.76
	F = 0.40 --- ---	F = 38.59 P < .0001 **ES = .21	F = 16.88 P < .0001 ES = .10	F = 81.00 P < .0001 ES = .36

* INFORMATION x GRADE INTERACTION (F = 4.30 P < .0001)

	A	T
2	2.76	3.21
5	2.60	3.49

** EFFECT SIZE CALCULATION (ω^2)

a grade by information source interaction was present indicating that the difference in confidence observed between advertising and trial was greater among the older children than among the younger age group ($F=4.30$, $p<.0001$). This pattern provides partial support for H1 and is consistent with the IIRM logic that beliefs and attitudes based on direct product experience are perceived to be more credible than those based on advertising.

Ad/trial versus trial. The second hypothesis suggested that while ad exposure prior to product trial might be expected to influence younger children's brand perceptions and attitudes, older children would remain unaffected by the ad, judging the brand instead, on the basis of their usage experience. This hypothesis was not supported. The observed age related patterns were, in fact, reversed from those hypothesized on the basis of extant theory. Consistent with previous findings, (e.g., Hoch and Ha 1986; Levin and Gaeth 1988; Smith 1993; Wright and Lutz 1993), no reliable differences were observed among the younger age group as a consequence of their exposure to an ad/trial sequence relative to trial alone ($F < 1$, $p > .10$). The younger children were unaffected by exposure to the ad prior to a trial experience, relying instead on the trial experience as the basis for their brand evaluation. While prior studies have attributed a similar result within an adult population to the unambiguous nature of the product experience, it may be that to a young child, the salience of a trial experience simply overwhelms any lingering effects of the ad. To the extent that younger children judge the ad primarily on the basis of the brand's appeal, as suggested by the findings of study one, the ad may convey very little beyond what the product itself reveals. While the ad may direct the younger child's attention to particular attributes, unless the actual experience reveals something that is

obviously discrepant from the ad, the ad may quickly recede into the background relative to the more salient, sensory based impressions derived from consuming the product. Though young children may be persuaded by commercials, ask their parents to buy the brands they see advertised, and choose these products over nonadvertised brands (e.g., Goldberg et al. 1978; Gorn and Goldberg 1982; Isler et al. 1987; Ward et al. 1977), the ads seem to retain little influence over young children's interpretations or brand evaluations in a consumption context.

A very different pattern was observed among the older children. The second hypothesis suggested that ad exposure prior to product trial would have little impact on older children's brand perceptions and attitudes as a consequence of its relatively low credibility, and the availability of relevant, sensory-based experiential evidence. Contrary to expectations, children's responses in an ad/trial sequence were significantly different than those based exclusively on trial experience. However, an interaction between stimulus set and experimental condition was present, indicating that the direction of the ad's influence was dependent on the specific advertisement under consideration (see Table 2). Exposure to either the cereal or snack chip ad prior to product trial had a positive influence on children's brand perceptions and attitude (Beliefs: $F=6.78$, $p<.01$; Brand Attitude: $F=6.00$, $p<.02$). Post-hoc analyses revealed that these particular ads were both more familiar ($\text{chi-square} = 24.90$, $p<.0001$) and more well-liked. Exposure to either the candy or fruit snack ad prior to product trial, on the other hand, led to more negative perceptions and attitudes toward the brand, than trial alone ($F=8.17$, $p<.007$; Brand Attitude: $F=9.61$, $p<.003$). So, while the direction of the

Table 2

The Interaction of Advertising and Product Trial: ANOVA Results.

<i>AD/TRIAL vs. TRIAL ONLY</i>		BELIEF	TOTAL EXPECTANCY	Δ_B
SECOND GRADE				
AD/TRIAL		3.02	9.90	4.31
TRIAL ONLY		2.90	9.40	4.29
		F < 1	F < 1	F < 1
FIFTH GRADE				
<i>"FAMILIAR/LIKED" ADS</i>				
AD/TRIAL		3.59	13.10	4.63
TRIAL ONLY		3.20	11.67	3.91
		F = 6.78	F = 3.91	F = 6.00
		P < .0135	P < .0563	P < .0196
		ES = .14	ES = .07	ES = .12
<i>"NOVEL/DISLIKED" ADS</i>				
AD/TRIAL		2.26	7.28	3.21
TRIAL ONLY		2.89	9.67	4.41
		F = 8.17	F = 9.31	F = 9.61
		P < .0072	P < .0044	P < .0039
		ES = .17	ES = .19	ES = .19
Belief Confidence:	AT	3.29		
	T	3.35	F = 0.55	
Δ_B Confidence:	AT	3.65		
	T	3.76	F = 1.26	
<i>AD/TRIAL vs. TRIAL/AD</i>		BELIEF	TOTAL EXPECTANCY	Δ_B
SECOND GRADE				
AD/TRIAL		3.02	9.90	4.31
TRIAL/AD		3.05	10.32	4.28
		F = 0.09	F = 0.45	F = 0.08
FIFTH GRADE				
<i>"FAMILIAR/LIKED" ADS</i>				
AD/TRIAL		3.59	13.10	4.63
TRIAL/AD		3.33	12.59	4.39
		F = 3.62	F < 1	F < 1
		P < .0655	---	---
		ES = .07	---	---
<i>"NOVEL/DISLIKED" ADS</i>				
AD/TRIAL		2.26	7.28	3.21
TRIAL/AD		3.13	10.93	4.46
		F = 17.82	F = 22.03	F = 11.12
		P < .0002	P < .0001	P < .0021
		ES = .32	ES = .37	ES = .22
Δ_B Confidence:	AT	3.65		
	TA	3.81	F = 5.44, p < .0229, ES = .03	
Belief Confidence:	AT	3.29		
	TA	3.44	F = 5.73, p < .0196, ES = .03	

ad's influence was a function of the specific stimulus shown, evidence of its influence was apparent across all stimulus pairs. Among the older children, exposure to an ad/trial sequence led to different brand perceptions and attitudes than trial alone, irrespective of the specific commercial execution. That ads may either enhance or detract from a child's brand experience may simply reflect the reality of advertising. Not all professionally developed commercials are equally effective, nor are the specific links between an ad and the brand it represents uniformly apparent. From a more theoretical perspective, research suggesting that familiarity leads to liking may also account for differences observed within the stimulus set (Hawkins and Hoch 1992). More important, however, is the basic finding that advertising appears to have the capacity to frame the consumption experience of older children, even in circumstances where the experiential evidence is clear or unambiguous. These findings suggest that it is the older, rather than the younger child, who allows the ad to shape his(her) interpretations and evaluations of the brand experience. While seemingly counterintuitive, both the results of the preliminary study and recent research indicating that "cued" processors (6 to 10-year-olds) do not necessarily draw on their cognitive defenses in specific viewing contexts support this response pattern (Brucks et al. 1988; Roedder 1981). While children in this age group certainly have the capacity to draw on their defenses, consider whether an ad is credible or not, or think skeptically about the advertiser's motives, they may not be inclined to do so without an external reminder. The older child's sensitivity to multiple levels of meaning and metaphorical capacity evident in the preliminary study also seem to suggest that this age group may be more open to its suggestion in a trial context.

Rather than viewing the ad unidimensionally as either true or false, or good or bad, they seemed to think about it more in terms of its possibilities. While they have the capacity to consider the multi-level meanings within an ad, the skepticism that characterizes adult processing may not be fully operative within a viewing context. This is a critical issue, particularly given the assumption within the hypothesis testing model and the IIRM that consumers view ads with skepticism and discount them on that basis. While the older children have the capacity to process the ad's meaning at multiple levels, they may not then spontaneously filter this insight through the appropriate defenses. As a consequence, the ad may continue to play a suggestive role, even when the consumption experience is presumably unambiguous.

To examine further the sequence effect observed among the older children, the means in the ad/trial and trial/ad cells were compared. One explanation that might be advanced for the framing effects observed within this group is that the quantity of information provided when an ad precedes trial relative to trial alone accounts for the changes in children's perceptions and attitudes. According to this scenario, the observed differences might be due to the provision of more information rather than the sequence in which the ad and the product are encountered. However, when the quantity of information was controlled for, sequence effects were observed on children's belief levels for both novel and familiar products (Novel: $F=3.62$, $p<.06$; Familiar: $F=17.82$, $p<.001$). Differences in total expectancy and brand attitude were also observed for the novel brands (Expectancy: $F=22.03$, $p<.001$; Brand Attitude $F=11.12$, $p<.002$). These findings indicate that, beyond the quantity of information provided, the order in

which children are exposed to the ad and the trial experience ultimately affects their brand perceptions and attitudes (see Table 2).

Trial/ad versus trial. The third hypothesis asserts that children exposed to a product trial/ad sequence and those who rate the brand on the basis of a trial experience alone, do not differ significantly in measures of their total expectancy or brand attitudes, irrespective of age group. The appropriate cell means and relevant F-test results for the planned comparisons needed to test H3 are reported in Table 3. The data were partially consistent with both H3 and previous research findings (Marks and Kamins 1988; Smith 1993). When ad exposure followed trial experience, it had a positive influence on children's specific brand-related perceptions ($F = 5.97, p < .02$) but did not affect their overall brand attitudes ($F < 1$). These findings indicate that advertising may have the capacity to influence children's specific beliefs about a brand even after product trial. Perhaps exposure to the ad following trial reinforces a positive consumption experience. No age differences or stimulus interactions were present.

Relationships among Ad Affect, Brand Perceptions and Attitudes

Hypotheses 4 through 10 examine the relationships between children's affective responses to advertising and their brand perceptions and attitudes. These hypotheses were tested using path analysis which is basically concerned with estimating the magnitude of the linkages between variables and using these estimates to provide information about underlying causal processes. Since the experimental cell size was too small to use LISREL (Bollen 1989), ordinary least squares regression was utilized to obtain the path coefficients, an appropriate estimation procedure when the specified

Table 3

Trial/Ad versus Trial: ANOVA Results.

	<u>BELIEF</u>	<u>TOTAL EXPECTANCY</u>	<u>A_B</u>
TRIAL/AD	3.13	11.03	4.35
TRIAL	2.97	10.03	4.23
	F = 1.85	F = 5.97	F < 1
	---	p < .02	---
	---		---

causal model is recursive (Asher 1983). OLS regression provides good estimates of the parameters providing regression assumptions are met, particularly the requirement that the residual variable in a structural equation is uncorrelated with the explanatory variables in that equation. The relationships in the modified dual mediation model can be specified as a series of regression equations with grade represented as a dummy variable:

$$\begin{aligned}
 A_{AD} &= \alpha_1 + \beta_1 \text{AdInfo} + \beta_2 \text{Ent} + \beta_3 \text{PA}_B + \beta_4 \text{Grade} + \\
 &\quad \beta_5 (\text{AdInfo} \cdot \text{Grade}) + \beta_6 (\text{Ent} \cdot \text{Grade}) + \beta_7 (\text{PA}_B \cdot \text{Grade}) + \epsilon_1 \\
 \text{Cog}_B &= \alpha_2 + \beta_8 \text{AdInfo} + \beta_9 A_{AD} + \beta_{10} \text{Grade} + \beta_{11} (\text{AdInfo} \cdot \text{Grade}) + \\
 &\quad \beta_{12} (A_{AD} \cdot \text{Grade}) + \epsilon_2 \\
 A_B &= \alpha_3 + \beta_{13} A_{AD} + \beta_{14} \text{Cog}_B + \beta_{15} \text{PA}_B + \beta_{16} \text{Grade} + \\
 &\quad \beta_{17} (A_{AD} \cdot \text{Grade}) + \beta_{18} (\text{Cog}_B \cdot \text{Grade}) + \beta_{19} (\text{PA}_B \cdot \text{Grade}) + \epsilon_3
 \end{aligned}$$

where:

A_{AD}	=	attitude toward the ad
Cog_B	=	perceptions of the brand
A_B	=	brand attitude
Grade	=	second or fifth grade
PA_B	=	prior brand attitude
AdInfo	=	perceptions of ad's informativeness
Ent	=	perceptions of ad's entertainment value
ϵ	=	error term

With these equations, it is possible to test whether the significance of the paths in the model change when children of different age groups are exposed to advertising or a combination of advertising and product trial. Path coefficients were estimated for each of the three cells incorporating ad exposure, using traditional regression techniques. Differences between age groups in the strength of model relationships were indicated by

the significance of interaction terms. For example, a significant coefficient for the ($A_{AD} \bullet \text{Grade}$) term (β_{1d}) in the ad only cell indicates a significant change in the impact of A_{AD} on A_B between second and fifth grade children. The results of these analyses are depicted in Figure 4, which lists unstandardized parameter estimates. Black arrows denote statistically significant relations at $p > .05$. White arrows represent nonsignificant relations. T-tests for within group differences between ad only and ad plus trial cells were conducted by incorporating appropriate covariance estimates in the error term. The within subjects comparisons suffered from low power due to relatively small samples per age group.

Direct effects of A_{AD} on A_B . Hypothesis four predicts that children's prior brand attitudes would have little impact on current brand attitudes, except in an ad only setting. As shown in Figure 4, the beta coefficient for the PA_B term was significant in the ad only condition for both second and fifth graders. Follow-up within group analyses among the fifth graders, revealed that the influence of prior brand attitudes (PA_B) on current brand evaluations was smaller in the ad only in comparison to the ad/trial combination cells. Differences observed between ad only and trial/ad were significant, but neither was significantly different from the ad/trial cell. Among the second graders, prior brand evaluations continued to influence current attitudes, even in a trial context.

Hypothesis five serves to establish the baseline against which trial based issues can be examined. It predicts a direct transfer of ad affect to brand attitude ($A_{AD} \rightarrow A_B$), in an ad only setting. As anticipated, A_{AD} mediates advertising's influence on A_B in a

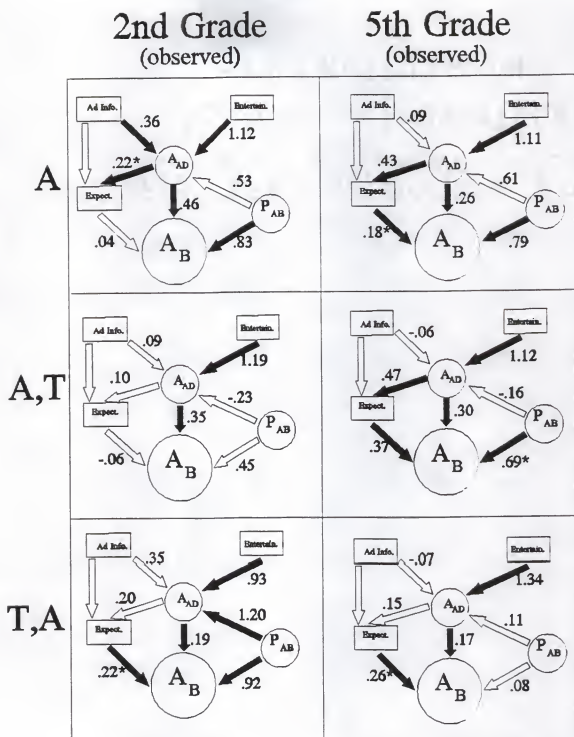


Figure 4. Path Analysis Results: Unstandardized Parameter Estimates.
 (Asterisks indicate marginally significant values, $p < .10$)
 a) Observed Relationships: 2nd vs. 5th Grade.

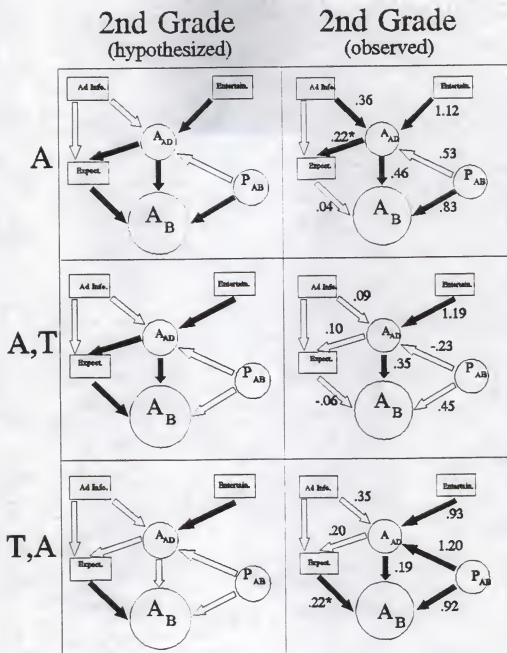


Figure 4. -- Continued. Path Analysis Results.

b) Hypothesized versus Observed Relationships: 2nd Grade

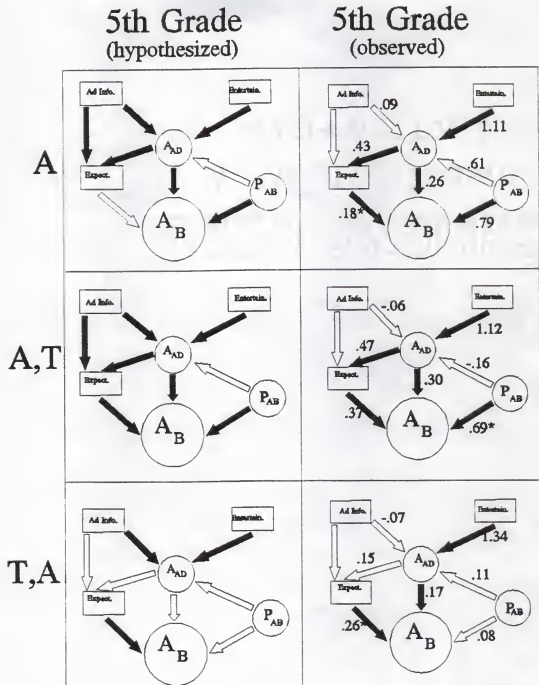


Figure 4. -- Continued. Path Analysis Results.
c) Hypothesized versus Observed Relationships: 5th Grade

prepurchase context, replicating previous findings and extending them to a young audience. This relationship was significant across age groups.

While children's affective responses to ads were expected to mediate advertising's influence on brand attitude in a prepurchase context, H_6 and H_7 predicted that A_{AD} 's influence would decline when children also had the benefit of product trial, particularly among the older age group. It was expected that older children would base their brand attitudes primarily on perceptions derived from product trial, with little evident impact of the ad's affective properties. Contrary to expectations, A_{AD} continued to have a direct influence on A_B , even when the older children had consumption experience. Among the younger children, on the other hand, support for H_7 which predicted a reduction in A_{AD} 's influence when trial precedes ad exposure, was evident. A significant decline in A_{AD} 's influence was observed between the ad only cell ($\beta = .46$) and the trial/ad cell ($\beta = .19$, $t = 2.12$, $p < .05$). Collectively, the evidence indicates that children's affective responses to ads directly mediate advertising's influence on brand attitude. Among the younger children, this influence begins to decline when advertising is coupled with product trial, particularly when trial follows message exposure. However, irrespective of age group, A_{AD} continues to influence children's brand attitudes, even in trial settings.

Indirect effects of A_{AD} on brand perceptions and attitude. H_8 through H_{10} examine the indirect effects of A_{AD} on A_B via brand perceptions. H_{8A} and H_{8B} predict that children's affective responses to an advertisement influence their perceptions of the promoted brand ($A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$) in a prepurchase context. Children's reactions to the ad itself may shape more specific expectations about the brand when there is little other

information to guide them. However, these expectations are expected to have little influence on brand attitude ($Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$), among the older children. Support for this hypothesis is shown in Figure 4. The beta coefficient for the $A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$ path is significant for the fifth graders ($\beta = .43$) and marginally significant for the second graders ($\beta = .22$), replicating the results of prior research among adult populations. However, the findings are mixed for the second step of the indirect mechanism. Contrary to expectations, no significant differences between age groups were found. Among the older children, the $Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$ path was weak ($\beta = .18$), as anticipated, reaching only marginal significance ($t = 1.70, p < .09$). However, it was expected that both paths of the indirect mechanism, $A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$ and $Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$, would be significant among the younger children. This hypothesis was based on the younger children's greater proclivity to enjoy watching ads, to trust them and to believe what they see depicted. However, the findings indicate that young children's affective responses to the ads had little influence on their brand perceptions, and as a consequence, little indirect influence on their brand attitudes. While A_{AD} exerts a direct influence on A_B , it has relatively little impact on shaping young children's brand perceptions. This pattern continues to hold when advertising is coupled with product trial, highlighting clear differences between the older and younger children.

H_5 predicted that when advertising precedes product trial, both paths of the indirect mechanism, $A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$ and $Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$, would be significant among the older children. This hypothesis was predicated on the idea that children's positive reactions to an ad lead to greater receptivity to ad claims, which in turn are reinforced through

Table 4

Standardized Parameter Estimates

Second Grade

Fifth Grade

	A	A/T	T/A	A	A/T	T/A
Ad Info \rightarrow A _{AD}	.31***	.10	.27	.08	-.07	-.05
Entertain \rightarrow A _{AD}	.75***	.82***	.61***	.74***	.77***	.89***
Prior A _B \rightarrow A _{AD}	.12	-.07	.46***	.14	-.05	.03
A _{AD} \rightarrow Expect	.32*	.13	.32	.61**	.62***	.23
Ad Info \rightarrow Expect	.21	.15	.05	-.02	-.09	.04
A _{AD} \rightarrow A _B	.71***	.43***	.37***	.41***	.37**	.33**
Expect \rightarrow A _B	.04	-.05	.27**	.20*	.35**	.32*
Prior A _B \rightarrow A _B	.31***	.17	.45***	.30*	.26*	.04

P < .01: ***

P < .05: **

P < .10: *

product trial. This hypothesis was supported, as shown in Figure 4. Both the $A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$ path ($\beta = .47$), and the $Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$ ($\beta = .37$) were statistically significant. These findings provide further evidence of the older children's sensitivity to ad information and reinforce the conclusions of the preliminary study. When the ad precedes trial, older children's affective responses to the ad color their perceptions of the brand, which are in turn, predictive of brand attitude. The standardized parameter estimates reported in Table 4 highlight the relative strength of these relationships. While H_8 was supported for the older children, the observed pattern for the younger children was contrary to expectations. As in the ad only cell, significant relationships were anticipated for both the $A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$ and the $Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$ paths. However, consistent with the ad only setting, neither path was significant. The beta coefficients for the two paths were ($\beta = .10$) and ($\beta = -.06$), respectively. Both of these represent a significant difference between the fifth graders ($A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$: $t = 2.11$, $p < .04$; $Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$: $t = 1.90$, $p < .06$). While the fifth graders' affective responses clearly influenced their brand perceptions and attitudes when ad preceded product trial, this was not true of the younger children. The impact of A_{AD} was captured exclusively through its direct link to brand attitude. Considered together, the results of H_8 and H_9 seem to suggest that the older children are in some respects more sensitive to the affective dimensions of advertising than the younger children. While younger children's affective responses play a role in shaping their brand attitudes, they seem to have little impact on their beliefs about the brand's specific qualities.

While A_{AD} was expected to influence children's perceptions and attitudes when advertising precedes trial, it was expected to have little impact when advertising follows a trial experience. In this situation, beliefs are likely to be based primarily on the experiential data that is encountered first, reducing the ad's capacity to affect product perceptions. Among the older children, trial may serve as the cue that enlists their cognitive defenses. As anticipated, the $A_{AD} \rightarrow Cog_B$ path in the trial/ad cell was not significant for either age group (2nd: $\beta = .20$; 5th: $\beta = .15$). This represents a significant change from both the ad only ($\beta = .43$, $t = 1.91$, $p < .06$) and ad/trial cells ($\beta = .47$, $t = 2.09$, $p < .05$) within the older age group. These results indicate that children's affective responses to an ad have the capacity to influence their perceptions about the brand, when (1) ads are encountered in prepurchase settings, or (2) advertising exposure precedes consumption experience. When advertising follows consumption, A_{AD} retains little influence over children's brand perceptions. While the path from A_{AD} to Cog_B was expected to be weak, the path from $Cog_B \rightarrow A_B$ was expected to be significant, as a consequence of product trial. This path was marginally significant for both age groups, as shown in Figure 4. For the younger children, this represents a marginal, though nonsignificant increase from both the ad and ad/trial conditions.

Discussion

Collectively, the findings seem to suggest that the older children are in some respects more sensitive to the ad information than are the younger children. While the older children allowed advertisements to influence their interpretations and evaluations of trial experiences, this was not true of the younger children. Contrary to expectations,

the younger children were relatively impervious to the advertised message whenever given the opportunity to sample the product. The salience of the trial experience overwhelmed any impact that the advertisement might have. Several factors, both conceptual and pragmatic, might account for this pattern of results. For young children, consumption experience is easily understood and evaluated. Sensory data are easily interpreted. It may be more salient than an advertisement and more readily recalled (Tybout and Scott 1983). From a motivational perspective, interest in the product may simply overwhelm the attraction of a commercial message. To the extent that younger children view ads primarily as a source of brand information as suggested in the preliminary study, it is not surprising that the product would dominate the commercial's appeal. The ad may convey very little beyond what the product itself reveals. From a processing perspective, it is easy for children to judge their product experiences according to their own, perhaps idiosyncratic criteria. These experiences are based on easily interpretable and salient, sensory information. Relative to product trial, the interpretation of an advertisement is inherently more complex. To depict the brand in its most appealing light, the advertiser seeks to transport the brand from the realm of the everyday and familiar, to a world replete with fantasy and hyperbole. Reconciling these disparate sources of brand information may represent a significant challenge to the younger child. Evidence indicating that younger children are more literal in their interpretive strategies supports this supposition (e.g., Young 1990). Given the symbolic character of advertising and the frequency of non-literal executions, the ad may not represent an effective anchor for the young child. Attempts to reconcile the message

elements with direct product experience may simply overtax the child's resources at the integration stage of processing. Greater understanding of the processing demands placed by multiple sources of marketplace information like advertising and product trial is needed to determine whether the findings reflect capacity constraints or not. While there is substantial evidence that young children are persuaded by the advertisements they encounter, it appears that these messages are not brought forward into the consumption context. These findings do not in any way suggest that younger children are immune to commercial messages. What they do suggest, is that among younger children (7-8 years-old), advertising's impact is felt primarily within a prepurchase context.

A distinctly different response pattern was revealed by the older children. While advertising theory and research indicates that older children are quick to discount commercial messages, the findings of this study seem to suggest otherwise. Among the older children, advertising appears to have the capacity to frame the interpretation of a consumption experience. Children's brand-related responses were influenced by advertising even in the face of presumably unambiguous experiential evidence. It is the older, rather than the younger child who allows the ad to shape his (her) brand perceptions and evaluations. Both the preliminary study and recent research indicating that "cued processors" don't necessarily activate their cognitive defenses spontaneously, support these findings. The older child's increased cognitive sophistication and experience with advertising may create a greater sensitivity to commercial content within a trial context. The findings of the preliminary study revealed that these children are astute observers of multiple levels of meaning in advertising. Rather than viewing the

ad as exclusively true or false, good or bad, entertaining or not, they seemed to think about it in terms of its possibilities. With greater facility in integrating the fantasy of an ad and the brand reality it represents, they were more open to the ad's appeal within a trial context than the younger children.

Consistent with the preliminary findings, path analytic results indicate that advertising seems to exert its influence primarily through its affective properties. Though researchers have not focused specifically on the mediating influence of attitude toward the ad on children's brand attitudes, it seems to play an important role among older children who have the capacity to discount advertising but may not always be inclined to do so. Children's attitude toward the ad influenced their brand attitudes and perceptions even when they had the benefit of direct product experience. A_{AD} 's influence is not confined to a direct transfer to brand affect but may shape children's beliefs about a brand as well. Children's positive reactions to the ad may lead to greater receptivity to ad claims, which are in turn reinforced through a favorable experience. The presence of the stimulus interactions also indicates that negative reactions to an ad may impact, albeit negatively, the interpretation of a consumption experience.

These findings stand in stark contrast both to the responses of the younger children and research studies involving adults that indicate A_{AD} has little impact in a consumption context (Smith 1993; Wright and Lutz 1993). While seemingly incongruous at first glance, 10 and 11 year-olds may differ in important respects from both of these other groups. Relative to younger children, the older age group has a greater capacity and inclination to construct linkages between the fantasy conveyed by an ad and the

reality of brand experience. However, these linkages may not necessarily take the form of specific brand expectations which are either confirmed or disconfirmed through trial experience. Both the initial study revealing the importance of entertainment in children's assessments and evidence from this study indicating that A_{AD} has a reliable impact on children's perceptions are consistent with the concept of transformational advertising. Both suggest that the creative elements within advertisements may play a more central role in the persuasion process than previously recognized within the children's advertising literature. Ads are not necessarily perceived primarily as conduits of brand information. Older children may allow their reactions to the ad color their impressions of the brand experience. Irrespective of whether younger children disregard the advertisement as a consequence of the greater salience of the product or difficulties encountered in integrating ad and brand information, they may be immune to advertising's influence within consumption settings. Adults, on the other hand, are more likely to draw spontaneously on their skepticism of advertising, blunting its impact except when the experience is ambiguous. It is, instead, the children who fall between these two extremes who may be most receptive to advertising's influence within a consumption context. Armed with new found understanding and appreciation for ad content, this group may be more susceptible to its suggestion and nuance when it comes to product use.

Collectively, the findings suggest that in the design of advertising for children, entertaining or likable ads may be particularly powerful in reaching the older, presumably more skeptical child. At the same time, the experimental findings serve to

move initial qualitative insights beyond the idiosyncratic, enabling a broader and more comprehensive analysis of how children respond to ads and products.

Notes

1. When the credibility of brand information varies, the individual's expectancy that a brand and feature are related is based on both belief strength and belief confidence (Marks and Kamins 1988; Smith 1993; Smith and Swinyard 1983, 1988). Following from the expectancy value model, total expectancy = belief strength \times belief confidence. The probabilistic nature of the belief strength construct is too complex to utilize in research with young children. In this study expectancy represents the sum of belief level times belief confidence.
2. Advertisements for four products were used in this study: (1) Pizzaria Chips, (2) Smarties, (3) Sodalicious Fruit Snacks and (4) Double Dip Crunch Cereal. At the inception of this study, all of these products were either unavailable in the local market or had been introduced only recently. These products were chosen in part on the basis that prior consumption experience would be minimized. Pretest data indicated that these products fit this criterion. However, three of the four products had been advertised in the local market prior to introduction.
3. For a thorough explication of the structural antecedents of Aad see Lutz 1985; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY 3

Collectively, the first two studies paint an intriguing and somewhat counterintuitive picture of children's perceptions of ad-product relationships. Unanticipated age group differences emerged in terms of how children approach ads and relate them to their consumption experiences. Younger children appeared to adopt a more utilitarian, brand focused perspective in thinking about ads; older children were more complex in their judgments, focusing on the creative and strategic dimensions as well. Although the pattern that emerged offers clear direction for further development and testing, both conceptual and empirical gaps remain. The third study, an in-depth qualitative investigation, is designed to address these deficiencies. The initial qualitative study provides the provisional concepts and categories to frame subsequent investigation. Without the discovery-oriented interpretive foundation, the experimental investigation would have rested on a view of advertising-trial relations as a hypothesis-testing process. Though useful, this approach would have led to a more impoverished perspective than that obtained by also capturing children's fascination with advertising's creative dimensions through the inclusion of affective constructs in the experimental design. The preliminary investigation also serves as the basis for further qualitative inquiry through the provision of tentative concepts, generalizations and questions. The relations children perceive between ad portrayals and their personal experiences appear to be much less

performance driven than initially presumed. However, the conditions when children's brand specific expectations play a more focal role, and the consequences of children's preoccupation with advertising's creative aspects, are not yet clear. The first two studies suggest that older and younger children differ in their appraisal strategies, the meaning and stability of these observations remain tentative. Returning to qualitative inquiry at this stage in the project represents an opportunity to examine the range and limitations of these patterns as well as embed understanding within the context of children's everyday lives and experiences.

The Functions of Qualitative Inquiry

While the value of qualitative inquiry in the exploratory phases of a research project is widely acknowledged among social scientists, less common is recognition of its value in enriching experimental or survey findings. Qualitative inquiry is often used to explore new topics, generate hypotheses or suggest new directions for further study. It is rarely drawn upon to clarify experimental findings, further test hypotheses suggested by experimental outcomes, or contextualize relationships isolated through traditional research methods. Just as this approach may serve as a valuable precursor to causal analysis, it is also well suited for illuminating the meaning of experimental findings, both anticipated and not. In the context of this project, return to the qualitative offers the opportunity not only to clarify unanticipated age-related patterns evident in the experimental investigation but to develop a richer understanding of how children think about ads and products, unconstrained by the close-ended measures and the underlying theory they represent. Emerging from the first two studies is a view of the older child

who is both less strident and more complex in his(her) reactions to advertising than theory seems to suggest. Jointly, these studies point to an increased sensitivity to advertising's meaning and intent among the older children that draws not only on relatively sophisticated notions of fantasy and reality, but demanding standards for creativity, novelty and credibility in advertising execution. The first study revealed how central a role entertainment plays in children's thinking about ads and what they mean. Evident was a fascination with the creative dimensions of ads and its unique properties as a communications genre. Drawing on the concepts suggested by the preliminary study, the experimental investigation showed how children's affective responses to advertising, both positive and negative, may spill over to the consumption experience, affecting how that experience is subsequently interpreted and evaluated. Younger children, on the other hand, seem to view ads in a more utilitarian fashion. While advertisements are perceived as a means of acquiring brand information, they have little incremental impact when coupled with product consumption. Further qualitative inquiry offers the opportunity to question and to challenge observed patterns, thereby enhancing the trustworthiness of the collective findings. It may also deepen interpretation of statistical relationships, both by enriching construct specification as well as through identification of contextual issues and constraints. While the experiment allowed for the testing of very specific conceptual relationships based on traditional assumptions and theoretical constructs, it was less well-equipped to capture the unexpected or the character of children's spontaneous reactions. The close-ended measures lend insight into theoretically derived aspects of children's cognitive and affective responses, under

controlled circumstances. More open-ended qualitative inquiry offers the opportunity to illuminate observed relationships, providing a glimpse of what underpins the scaled responses. Potentially consequential aspects of children's natural responses to ads and products are not captured through traditional measures. Close ended measures leave little room for respondent perceptions and reactions. Qualitative study provides the opening to look back to the experimental variables and assess their import or significance. Its capacity to illuminate and enrich the findings and conclusions of more traditional research efforts is perhaps its greatest advantage, one which is certainly lost when limited to exploratory status.

Methodological Pluralism

The use of diverse research approaches to investigate a single consumer phenomenon offers both great challenge and opportunity. Although some consumer researchers have argued that positivist and interpretive approaches are incommensurable as a consequence of divergent objectives and philosophical assumptions (e.g., Anderson 1986, 1988; Hudson and Ozanne 1988; Thompson, Stern and Arnould 1993), others have been more optimistic (Hirschman 1986; Hunt 1991; Lutz 1989, 1991; McQuarrie and Mick 1992). Recently, researchers have suggested that through the exploration of divergence a greater sensitivity to the socio-cultural assumptions that underpin various methods is obtained (Thompson et al. 1993). Advocates of critical pluralism, on the other hand, have focused on the complementarity of multiple methods and the potential synergistic dimensions of their use within the context of a single research project. According to its proponents, critical pluralism offers a means to converge upon a

consumer phenomenon, and consequently attain a deeper and more complete understanding of its nature.

The potential benefits of pluralist approaches within consumer research are well-illustrated in a small but growing number of empirical studies (Fischer and Arnold 1990; McQuarrie and Mick 1992; O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Wallendorf and Arnould 1991). However, even within this limited set there is substantial diversity in the means by which positivist and interpretive methods are utilized and combined. For example, O'Guinn and Faber (1989) adopted a more traditional approach in their study of compulsive buying. They utilized phenomenological interviews to illustrate and reinforce key survey findings. Wallendorf and Arnould (1991), in contrast, relied on survey data to generate ideas about Thanksgiving consumption rituals that they then refined and tested through their primary data sets, depth interviews and participant observation. To investigate advertising resonance, McQuarrie and Mick (1992) utilized both interpretive and positivist approaches including semiotic text analysis, phenomenological interviews, content analysis of ads, and experimentation. An explicit goal of their investigation concerned the synergistic insights that would emerge from a combined approach. In their analysis and discussion, they focused on how the disparate methods converged upon key findings, consequently providing a more complete, well-grounded and scientifically valid picture of resonance than any single approach might offer. Collectively, these early forays into critical pluralism testify to the value of combining positivism and interpretivism in such a way that the unique strengths of each are maximized.

Within the domain of children's consumer socialization research, traditional survey or experimental methods remain the norm. The positivist tradition has provided useful tools for the assessment of advertising's effects on children's perceptions, attitudes and behavior. Interpretive approaches have not been utilized extensively within children's consumer studies perhaps owing to concerns about young children's emergent verbal and cognitive abilities (e.g., Goldberg and Gorn 1983; Peracchio 1990; Wells 1965). Though conducted a generation ago, some of the most widely cited studies within the children's advertising literature are based on open-ended interviews with children (e.g., Bever et al. 1975; Blatt et al. 1972; Rossiter and Robertson 1974; Ward 1972; Ward et al. 1977). As children's advertising research matured, this type of approach was criticized for its exploratory character and essentially abandoned. While these investigations provided initial insight into the ways children think about advertising, they were not strictly phenomenological in orientation. Typically, children's responses to questions about advertising's intent and character were coded into theoretically derived categories established prior to data collection. In essence, an etic or researcher driven perspective was adopted, versus a more child-centered emic approach. Collectively, the consumer literature offers few, if any examples of post-positivist research involving children. However, interpretive methods including depth interviews and participant observation have been utilized successfully in education, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, anthropology and sociology (e.g., Barker 1990; Coles 1986; Damon and Hart 1988; Fine and Sandstrom 1988). Children are frequently called upon to provide testimony in legal proceedings, participate in clinical interviews and respond

to open-ended questions posed by educators and researchers (e.g., Bierman and Schwartz 1986; Capelli, Nakagawa and Madden 1990; Gelman and Kremer 1991; Garbarino and Stott 1989). Although there is little doubt that interviews with children pose special challenges, the effective use of these approaches within the social sciences testifies to their potential value within a consumer domain.

In the context of this project, a critical pluralist perspective was adopted as a means of capitalizing on the strengths of both interpretive and positivist approaches. An explicit goal of the design concerned the synergistic insights that might emerge from the combination of experimentation and depth interviews in research with children. The experiment allows for the testing of very specific conceptual relationships based on prior theory and research, while the qualitative studies provide insight into children's subjective experiences and systems of meaning. By triangulating across methods, the design has the potential to capture both the rich insights afforded by interpretive approaches as well as the precision and replicability of a causal design. Findings from the initial qualitative study served as input to the design of the experiment by revealing the complex role affective constructs play in shaping children's impressions about ads and their product experiences. The experiment provided the opportunity to isolate and test a subset of these relationships under controlled conditions. The third study, a more in-depth qualitative investigation, may help to illuminate the experimental findings by capturing contextual factors or contingencies that are highly relevant to children's everyday lives yet remain undetected in an experimental setting. At a more molar level, the qualitative investigation addresses a more complex and richer set of issues than an

experimental design might allow. Not only does it serve to ground understanding in the context of children's subjective experiences, it also enables an assessment of the convergence or lack thereof among methods. Essentially complementary in nature, the hybrid design provides the opportunity to consider advertising-consumption relationships within a traditional methodological domain yet assess how the pattern of these relationships appears relative to a more open-ended perspective. By triangulating across methods, different aspects of a phenomenon may be revealed, providing a more enriched perspective of a substantive phenomenon than that obtained through a single methodological source (Lutz 1991; Wells 1993). By blending the findings of individual studies conducted from different perspectives and using different methods within a single research project, it is hoped that our appreciation of children's consumption activities will be enhanced.

Overview

Utilizing grounded theory perspectives and analytic strategies, the third study represented a return to the field for a more in-depth qualitative examination of the concepts and a priori themes suggested by the first two studies. Essentially phenomenological in nature, this investigation was designed to provide a forum for children to express their point of view about specific ads, their personal experiences with advertised products, and the marketplace in which these stimuli are encountered. Three broad research questions framed this study (1) how focal are the links between advertising and product consumption from a child's perspective? (2) what are the categories of meaning that children draw upon in thinking about advertisements and their

product experiences? and (3) how are these relationships embedded in children's broader conceptions of what advertising is and how it works? By adopting a more molar-level perspective, this study was intended to evoke a deeper awareness of the perceived causes, activities and consequences that underpin children's responses. More systematic and comprehensive than the preliminary study, extensive in-depth interviews were conducted with thirty-eight second and fifth grade children. The structure of these interviews was unusual, if not unique. In the first phase, an advertisement and brand pair were used to stimulate discussion, in a quasi-replication of the experimental design. Children were assigned to one of four interview approaches mirroring the ad and trial exposure contexts of the experiment yet reflecting an open-ended response format. Experienced researchers have stressed the importance of avoiding abstraction by providing children with concrete stimuli in interview situations (Wells 1965). In the preliminary study, this strategy was used to great advantage. The children seemed to find the ads and trial experience highly motivating but quickly moved on to the issues and concerns of interest to them. As a consequence, the second phase of these interviews was designed to be very loosely structured, drawing more extensively on the children's personal experiences. More strictly phenomenological in nature, the direction and flow of these discussions were set largely by the children, who were encouraged to describe their experiences, feelings and reactions. Greater understanding of children's intuitive ideas about marketing activities and influence is an important research objective because these ideas may guide their reactions to specific situations or circumstances (Wright 1986).

Method

Research Process

Research design. In this investigation, a two-phased depth interview strategy was developed to learn more about how children relate advertisements to their consumption experiences. Rather than relying exclusively on an unstructured interview format, the broad framework of the experimental design was also preserved in this study. In the first phase of the interview, a brand and ad pair were used to stimulate discussion. Reflecting the structure of the experiment, children were exposed to one of four stimulus contexts (1) the advertisement alone, (2) the advertisement followed by the product, (3) the product followed by the ad, or (4) the product alone. These props were used as a means to ground the conversation, at least initially, at a concrete level, rather than at the more abstract level utilized in early studies of children's advertising response. The inclusion of the ad and product within the interview clearly lessens the cognitive demands placed on the child thus enhancing the trustworthiness of the data obtained (Goldberg and Gorn 1983; Peracchio 1990; Wells 1965). Use of the concrete stimuli may also help to clarify how the character of children's responses change depending on whether they are asked to comment on advertising in general or react to specific commercial messages. While research efforts have often pointed to the growing skepticism of children through the elementary years (e.g., Robertson and Rossiter 1974; Ward et al. 1977), the findings of the preliminary study support more recent work suggesting that children may not draw on these general attitudes in a viewing context. While the props clearly lent some structure to the interviews, they were utilized primarily as a springboard to the issues and

concerns of interest to the children. The second phase of the interview was quite loosely structured, drawing more extensively on the consumption related events and personal experiences that the children recounted. Appendix D contains a copy of the interview schedule. Qualitative research interviews are neither strictly structured nor entirely non-directive but focused on particular themes of the respondents' life-world (Kvale 1983). The shape and tone of these conversations was cast largely by the children as they related specific experiences they had had, both positive and negative, with heavily promoted products.

The two-phased strategy offers the potential to attain a deeper understanding of children's subjective experiences with ads and products than pure phenomenological interviews might allow. Replication of the ad and trial exposure contexts provides a bridge from the experiment to the largely unstructured interview approach. It has the potential to extend the experimental analysis by mirroring the stimulus context yet in a much more fluid, open-ended response format. It is this facet of the interviews that provides the most direct basis for further scrutiny of the experimental findings, particularly those which depart from conventional wisdom. By incorporating concrete stimuli, the interview strategy also provides the opportunity to learn more about how children's perceptions might shift as a function of whether they are exposed to a brand through an advertisement, a consumption experience or both. The structure permits systematic analysis not only across age groups but across situations children frequently encounter. A basic operational strategy common to both grounded theory research and other forms of naturalistic inquiry is to seek maximal variation in the phenomenon under

investigation. A clear advantage of the structured phase of the interview is that it permits such comparison. The largely unstructured approach within the second phase of the interview further opens up the design to allow key dimensions of a child's life-world to emerge. More strictly phenomenological in orientation, the second phase is designed to further illuminate the constellation of attitudes and perceptions through which informants define their experiences with ads and products. Data from both phases of these interviews provides a critical basis for questioning response patterns evident in the first two studies.

Interviews and sampling procedure. Thirty-eight individual depth interviews were conducted with children between the ages of seven and eleven. Eighteen of the children were in second grade and twenty were in fifth grade. The children were recruited from a public school in a small southeastern city, reflecting primarily a middle class population. This was not the same school from which the preliminary study sample was drawn. Unlike the initial study, participants were not directly acquainted with the researcher prior to the interview sessions. While this posed the additional challenge of establishing rapport with the respondents, it also permits further assessment of the utility of depth interview methods in research with children. Consistent with the patterns evident in the initial study, the children were enthusiastic participants both with respect to the content and process of the interviews. The respondents clearly enjoyed the conversations and were quite willing to share their views. While they tended to approach the interview as a fun experience, informants were also quite serious in their judgments and unafraid to offer negative as well as positive points of view. In both the first and

third studies, the children were highly-involved in the interviews, approaching the task with a seriousness of purpose that was not altogether expected at the outset of the project. Interestingly, some of the children seemed to adopt almost the role of teacher as they conveyed their opinions and impressions. This was particularly common among the younger age group.

Although the preliminary findings seemed to point to interpretive differences between the younger and older children, additional interviews were needed to assess the dependability of these patterns (Wallendorf and Belk 1989). A clear limitation of the initial study was insufficient interview data among the younger age group. Only four of the twenty-two interviews in that study involved second graders. Though age-related differences began to surface even with such a small sample, extensive comparative data are needed to define the limits of the emergent patterns. Common to grounded theory as well as other forms of naturalistic inquiry is careful, ongoing comparison and the systematic search for negative case examples (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1967). Use of the constant comparative method helps the researcher to guard against bias by challenging provisional concepts with new data (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Inclusion of the two age groups is necessary to ascertain the extent to which the explanation advanced in the initial study is enduring, and the extent to which it derives from the idiosyncratic convergence of a particular time and place.

The interviews ranged from 45 to 130 minutes, varying as a function of the child's interest, depth of insight and schedule. Most of these interviews were carried out

in two (range = 1-3) sessions scheduled anywhere from two to ten (mean = 4.5) days apart. This format proved quite useful, providing the researcher with the opportunity to review the audiotapes and identify areas that might benefit from further exploration in an additional meeting. Interestingly, the children also frequently returned with topics they wanted to introduce, clarify or embellish. An unanticipated benefit of this approach was that it enabled an informal assessment of the consistency of the child's perspective across a short time frame. It was not unusual as topics were revisited, for the child to return to earlier examples they had introduced and extend them in some way, typically preceded by a statement such as "Remember when I was telling you about ____ the other day". As is characteristic of qualitative inquiry, key informants were identified as the interviews progressed (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Interviews conducted among this group which cut across both age and gender lines, tended to be longer, more detailed and broader in scope. Working within the parameters established by the school, every effort was made to maximize the information obtained from these informants. Fortunately, both teachers and administrators were very supportive of this project throughout its execution. Teachers identified substantial blocks of time during particular school days when children were free to participate. All interviews were conducted in a pleasant and private room in the rear of the school library. The only significant constraint placed by the researcher on the scheduling of the interviews was that exposure to the ad and or product experience was contained within a single session. As a consequence, the stimuli were introduced relatively early within the interview sessions to guard against respondent fatigue.

Field notes. As in the preliminary study, detailed field notes were kept, summarizing the progress and direction of the research. Most of these were analytic memos. Extensive notes were taken detailing the course of the data analysis, the conceptual development and new questions arising from individual interviews. A critically important function of analytic field notes is the venue it establishes for continuous testing of the emerging interpretation against the data and the recording of the researcher's analytic process. Not only are convergent patterns or themes identified, but also weaknesses in the data, discrepancies and areas of confusion are noted. By articulating both the strengths and weaknesses of the data, the researcher can assess the credibility of the interpretation as it develops, carefully documenting the degree to which conclusions are grounded in the data. To minimize the potential impact of investigator bias, it is imperative that researchers detail their assumptions, methodological decisions and the progress of their analysis on a continuing basis.

Analytic Strategy

Grounded theory procedures and aims constitute the primary analytic strategy for this study (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1990). The ultimate objective of this approach is the development of an inductively derived substantive theory, grounded in the reality of children's experience. This study represents a step towards the achievement of that objective.

A well-constructed grounded theory constitutes a rich, tightly woven explanatory theory of a substantive phenomenon. Through this methodology, concepts and relationships are not only generated but also provisionally tested. Moving beyond the

generation of interpretive themes, a grounded theorist specifies the relationships among these conceptual categories. Each conceptual category or theme is developed in terms of its properties and dimensions, conditions which give rise to it, the interaction by which it is expressed and the consequences it produces (Corbin and Strauss 1990). Through such specification, categories acquire precise definition and explanatory power. Over time, conceptual categories are related to one another to build a theoretical explanation that is faithful to and illuminates the substantive phenomenon under investigation. While a fully-articulated grounded theory is the ultimate aim of this research program, this study reflects progress toward but not achievement of that goal. The analysis of the interview data, at this juncture, stops short of specifying, in a comprehensive and hierarchical fashion, relationships among categories or themes. What the analysis does provide is the interpretive foundation for a theory construction effort. Further development and testing of the interpretive scheme outlined below is needed to fulfill the requirements of the grounded theory approach. As it stands, the interpretation identifies meaningful patterns and categories in the data but does not fully specify the relationships among them or the conditions that give rise to particular response patterns. For example, although there was relatively little skepticism apparent in most of the interviews, a few of the participants were highly critical. At this point in the analysis, it is not clear what accounts for this variation or what broader consequences it might have in terms of children's overall orientation to ad-product relations. Failure to account for these differences reflects the need to return to the axial coding stage of the analytic process. It is at this stage that conceptual categories are refined and related to one another,

moving the interpretation beyond a series of discrete categories. Until these additional analytic steps are taken, the interpretation stops short of a fully developed grounded theory.

In keeping with the end objective of this research program, grounded theory analysis techniques were followed. What distinguishes this approach from other methods of analysis is the systematic analytic procedures and structure it provides. By working through a well-established set of analytic operations, the research process acquires added precision and rigor, thus enhancing the trustworthiness of the research conclusions (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Strauss and Corbin 1990; Wallendorf and Belk 1989).

Research conclusions are based on the verbatim transcripts of the depth interviews. Approximately eight hundred pages of transcript were generated by thirty-eight interviews. These transcripts are the data from which conceptual categories and relationships are discovered, clarified and ultimately integrated. Analysis in grounded theory consists of three major types of coding (1) open coding, (2) axial coding and (3) selective coding (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Coding represents the operations by which data are broken down analytically, conceptualized and then recombined in new ways. It is the central process by which theories are built from data. Open coding is the interpretive process by which data are initially broken down and conceptual labels applied. This phase of the analytic process pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of essential elements and features through close examination of the interview transcripts. During open coding, the text of each transcript is broken down into discrete events, ideas, or incidents. Each of these incidents, whether reflected in a

paragraph or a sentence, is then given a conceptual label. As the analysis proceeds, specific incidents or ideas are compared with one another so that conceptually similar phenomena are grouped together to form categories and subcategories. Through the painstaking process of comparing each new incident to those that precede it, similarities and differences are identified and conceptual definitions made more precise. As these categories and their properties are specified, the text is then sorted and restructured according to its conceptual or thematic content. The researcher can then work from data files that have been conceptually coded, reorganized and integrated across respondents. In this study, the coded transcripts were organized by age group and exposure context. Open coding and the use it makes of questioning and constant comparisons enables the researcher to minimize bias. Decomposition of the data into its basic components forces preconceived notions to be examined against the data. Inconsistencies, assumptions not supported in the data and conceptual discoveries are all detected through open coding procedures.

While open coding fractures the data, axial coding pieces the data back together in new ways by relating conceptual categories to one another. Through axial coding, the analysis begins to evolve beyond a series of discrete categories to an interconnected conceptual network. Individual themes are specified in greater detail and relationships among these thematic elements articulated. Essential elements are integrated, identifying patterns of influence, relationship and consequence. For example, one of the key categories that emerged both in this study and the preliminary investigation was the role of entertainment in children's reactions to ads, and indirectly, products. Through open

coding procedures, multiple instances of children's references to entertainment in advertisements were identified. Particularly among the older children, the concept of entertainment began to take on a more precise meaning as its properties were revealed in the data. While broadly speaking it might simply refer to ad executions that are amusing or engaging, children focused extensively on novelty, creativity and the lack of predictability in advertisements. These features may represent a sub-category within the broader notion of entertainment. Identifying and labelling these elements and others, however, represents only the first step in the analytic process. Determining when entertainment serves as the principal basis for children's ad perceptions, whether these patterns hold across age groups, and the consequences of viewing ads in a way that touches on the product sometimes only tangentially are also central issues. At this stage, the analysis should capture key patterns and relationships within the data that hold across specific informants and episodes.

Selective coding is the final step of the analytic process. In this phase, the central phenomenon or "core category" is identified and systematically related to other categories, validating those relationships and isolating those that need refinement. Ultimately, a richly textured, well-integrated theoretical formulation is derived, one that closely approximates the everyday reality it represents. In moving toward that objective, this study reveals a picture of children's consumption experience that departs in some measure from traditional thinking. By looking beyond purely information processing and policy driven concerns, it is possible to begin to capture the rich texture and essence of advertising's meaning in children lives.

Perhaps the greatest challenge in the conduct of qualitative research is the derivation of a set of analytic categories that capture both the essence and richness of a substantive phenomenon. From volumes of descriptive detail, a set of abstract interpretive themes are developed and integrated that must remain true to the reality and complexity of respondents' thoughts, feelings and experience. At a minimum, this is a daunting task.

Research Findings

A Priori Themes

At the inception of this study, two a priori conjectures had emerged. First, age-related patterns observed in the first two studies were inconsistent with prevailing views about how children's reactions to advertising evolve over time. Though the specific nature of these differences remained somewhat clouded, there were clear indications that the older children were more open to ad content, more likely to draw on an ad in a consumption context and only rarely overtly skeptical. The preliminary study also seemed to suggest that the younger children focused more intently on the product message. However, the limitations of that data base preclude any definitive conclusions. This study was designed to explore the nature and extent of these age group differences on a more systematic level.

Second, it was clear at least among the older age group, that children's perceptions of an advertisement are driven at least as much by its capacity to entertain and amuse as by its utility as a source of product information. This fascination with the creative dimensions of advertisements has both proximal and distal consequences. At one

level, children's affective responses to an ad may influence their perceptions of a subsequent consumption experience, making it more enjoyable, exciting or intriguing than it might otherwise be. The link between the brand conveyed through the fanciful world of advertising and its reality in the everyday world may be forged not so much on the basis of specific expectations about performance but on a much more diffuse basis, drawing extensively on the ad's affective appeal as well as the brand's overall perceived value. At another level, children's focus on advertising's creative properties has little to do with the product being promoted. Children seem to consume ads much the way they might consume a program. Ads are judged on their capacity to hold attention, the novelty of the execution, the creativity of the idea and the social consequences (if any) of the message. Contrived appeals are judged harshly as are actors' performances. In part, this approach to advertising reception may represent an end in and of itself. Ads are simply a rich source of entertainment, aggravation or amusement. At the same time, the children focused extensively on how specific ads were created and why they were constructed in particular ways. They seemed to be trying to figure out advertising's unique properties and strategies, in some sense grappling with the nature of the communication itself. Focus on an ad's creative elements may in part reflect children's deepening understanding of advertising's persuasive intent and character.

Representing diverse research traditions, the findings of both the preliminary study and the experiment suggest that the information-centered perspective that has guided research may neglect important aspects of children's advertising reception. Perhaps it is appropriate to view advertising's role in broader terms than as a purveyor

of brand information. With additional insight into children's perceptions, the need for such refinements can be assessed.

Thematic Analysis and Interpretation

Overview. Consonant with patterns emerging from the first two studies, distinct age-related perspectives of ad-consumption relations were revealed in this investigation. Material differences in how younger and older children think about ads and products were evident across the situations, events and issues the informants brought to bear within the interviews. Emerging from the data were two seemingly disparate points-of-view, one that is rather narrow and product focused, and the other that is more-inclusive, yet firmly centered on creative dimensions. These two perspectives labelled "art critic" versus "informed shopper" frame the interpretation, providing the core conceptual category or central phenomenon around which all other categories are integrated. Discussion of the findings is organized around elucidating the meaning of these two perspectives, as well as their relationship to secondary themes emerging through the analytic process. In attempting to understand how younger and older children differ in their approach to consumption-related issues, significant supporting themes arose, relating to (1) the perceived interdependence of ads and brands, (2) children's judgments of fantasy and reality (3) considerations of advertising's unique character and form and (4) the role of skepticism in a viewing context. Use of the ad and brand props facilitated the interview process and helped to illuminate the nature and consequences of these differing approaches to interpreting ad-consumption relations. Subtle differences in children's interpretive strategies were evident across exposure contexts. However, these differences tended to be overshadowed by age-related distinctions. As a consequence, discussion of

the findings focuses primarily on clarifying these more fundamental patterns and relationships.

Among the younger children, advertisements tend to be perceived primarily as a conduit for communicating brand information. Much like an aisle within a toy store or a catalog before Christmas, ads are a source of product hopes and ideas. Within this perspective ads are viewed primarily in functional terms. Commercials are helpful in the sense that they present information about new toys or enhancements, ideas for lunchtime or snacks and serve as a basis for product requests to parents. As a consequence, specific messages are judged primarily on the basis of the products they depict. Whether an ad is viewed positively or not, is largely a function of the product's inherent appeal. Products are assumed to be as they are represented in commercial messages, and among these children, little evidence of disappointment was revealed. Links between ads and brands are feature based and direct. Ads are perceived as a means to an end. Their interest value rests on excitement generated by the products they depict.

Among the older children, on the other hand, ad-consumption relations were construed on a much more diffuse basis. An advertisement may be viewed in a more complex, multidimensional fashion that incorporates creative and strategic considerations, but that has little direct relation to the appeal of the product itself. Motivated in their reactions to advertising not so much by skepticism but by an interest in the creative properties of ads, older children focused their attention primarily on executional elements with the personal implications of the brand message a distant second. Evident in their comments is a fascination with advertising's creative elements and the process by which

these messages are constructed. The entertainment value of an ad, its underlying creative strategy and presumptions about an advertiser's specific goals begin to assume a more prominent role in their thinking. The process of constructing meaning becomes more complex as the perspective of the manufacturer begins to be taken into account. No longer simply a receiver of the product message, the child begins to look at advertisement relations in terms of a broader system in which there are multiple participants. Cognizant of the selling intent that underpins advertised messages, they begin to expect hyperbole and exaggeration. Ads come to be viewed metaphorically rather than literally. As a consequence, truth in advertising is less likely to be considered in black and white terms. In recognizing that advertisements incorporate fictional elements, children begin to judge truth in a more relaxed fashion. Exaggeration and puffery are not necessarily rejected out of hand but evaluated in terms of their underlying plausibility or the kernel of truth these message elements represent. This newfound sophistication and interest in how these messages are constructed seems to create an openness to the persuasive appeal, rarely attributed to children of this age group.

In the discussion that follows, the nature of these two perspectives is developed further. Inclusion of the younger age group in this study proved to be a sound methodological decision. Their perceptions differ markedly from those of the older children. Through this comparison, the point of view revealed by the older group throughout this research project begins to take on a more definitive shape and meaning. As a counterpoint, the second graders' product orientation helps to illuminate the significance of the creative focus adopted by the older children.

Without question, the shift in emphasis that occurs is tied to children's evolving interpretive strategies. As noted in an earlier chapter, older children are better able to distance themselves from a message and think about it, evaluate and judge it in a more reflective fashion (Ward et al. 1977; Young 1986, 1990). Criteria for distinguishing between fantasy and reality also become more multifaceted and complex (Kelly 1981; Winner 1988; Winnick and Winnick 1979; Young 1990). This particular developmental accomplishment is especially relevant to understanding how children merge the fantasy portrayed in advertising with the reality of everyday brand use. This study is neither intended, nor appropriate for, explicating the nature of these cognitive mechanisms. However, it is useful for illuminating how children with these new found skills and insights use their understanding to make sense of ad-product relations.

Art critic or shopper. Perhaps the most dominant feature of the younger children's view of advertised messages is their utility as a source of brand information. Commercials are perceived to be a rich source of ideas for new toys, snacks and gifts. Children readily describe incidents in which they have drawn on advertisements to compile their Christmas or more informal wish lists. Commercial messages are frequently the basis for product requests to parents. Clearly evident in their descriptions, is a proactive stance to advertising. They are not simply recipients of these messages, but active participants in the acquisition and use of this information. Advertisements are not something to be endured until the program returns, but a fertile source of inspiration about new games, lunchtime treats and toys. Viewing is purposeful and directed.

Commercials represent a valued source of product information, particularly with respect to new toys, features or line extensions.

I really, really watch some commercials about Barbie. I like to watch them because I like to see how pretty the Barbies are and if there is going to be like a new kind of Barbie. There is one Barbie that I got on a commercial where she could dance with a Ken doll. Then it comes with some little lipstick type thing on a towel. You dip it in cold water and put the lipstick on the Barbie. The Barbie's lipstick turns darker. {203, F}

Not surprisingly, girls are quick to describe seemingly limitless variants of Barbie dolls, clothes and accessories as well as the contents of commercials that depict them. Similarly, boys readily list available Super Soaker models, new Nintendo games and recent Lego line extensions. Their depth of knowledge is impressive, both in terms of the products themselves and the advertisements that promote them. The most easily brought-to-mind commercials, are those that promote toys, games, snack foods or cereals. Unlike their older counterparts, the younger children view ads very much in functional terms. That is not to say they do not appreciate what is funny or silly. These dimensions may help to draw their attention, but they are simply not of primary interest. The children talk about whether they like specific advertisements on the basis of whether they find the brand appealing, and, whether they think their mom or dad will buy it.

I like the one where you get the concentrated color water junk. You put it in the gun and it shoots and it's disappearing ink, that stuff. It has a motorized one that you have to buy batteries for, and you can shoot it and it's concentrated so if it gets in your eyes it won't burn. I haven't gotten it yet, but I want my mom to get it for me. {204, M}

This utilitarian perspective is evident both in the types of ads they used as examples and in the terms they used to describe them. While the older children were equally likely to draw on a carpet, chicken or cat food commercial to illustrate their reasoning, the

younger children rarely considered products they were unlikely to consume. When asked to describe commercial contents, children's comments focused on the brand and its features, what it looks like and what it does.

I have a collection of My Little Ponies and I like those commercials. They show different ponies. They show girls playing with ponies and they make the ponies like jump and stuff. Just for one certain pony, for one kind, like if you twist it up or something it will dance. I have one of those. I have like twenty-five My Little Ponies. I get one for every birthday and stuff. {207, F}

Line extensions and new features were readily recognized, evaluated and comparisons to other similar brands spontaneously offered. Preoccupied with the toys or foods that the advertisements present, the execution seemed to represent little more than a pleasant afterthought. In describing specific ads that they remembered, comments about the executional elements in commercials were rare. Instead, the younger respondents concentrated on specific product characteristics and benefits. The children readily shared the details of related consumption experiences, either their own or their friends', as well as store visits where they've seen these items and strategies they have used to influence their parents' purchase decisions. The lack of attention to the creative elements in advertisements was striking, particularly in light of the patterns observed among the older children. With few exceptions, the executional elements simply did not enter the conversation when children shared experiences with ads and products from their everyday lives. The salience of the product and its appeal seemed to simply overwhelm the impact of a funny or novel execution. This was true, though moderated, even in the context of advertisements that employed bizarre or striking executions. For example, a commercial for the Wacky Warehouse Mall in which a giant Kool-Aid character bursts through walls,

turns colors and has a funny voice is perceived to be funny but the child's primary interest is still the product and premium offer.

They have real fun stuff, like flying eyeballs with legs. They do really funny things. They have little birds on springs and they tell you stuff that you can do at the store, like count stickers. You press the sticker and it does a funny voice. If you get the Mr. Kool-Aid guy, you press one button that's green and he says "This is the Wacky Warehouse Mall!" When you press the red button, for the great Bluedini, he goes in the vacuum cleaner. They're fifty cents each sticker. You win a prize by, you open the package and it says either "You are an instant winner" or "Sorry, try again." Once I've gotten to be a winner. I won the Purplesaurus Rex that way. {210, M}

The use of the brand and ad stimuli within the interview were useful for examining the product versus execution focused distinction that had emerged in the data. While the product was emphasized in the context of ads that the children spontaneously brought to mind, and in the examples they offered, the execution of the fruit snack ad to which they were exposed during the interview was an obvious source of interest, and pleasure or distaste. In this ad, a fanciful execution was employed to promote the idea that the snack was exciting and unusual, containing soda flavors and features unlike conventional brands. Through the use of special effects, children in the advertisement are initially depicted as one dimensional characters. After trying the snack, they pop back to three dimensional form, and enthusiastically proclaim the merits of the brand. Soda bubbles cover the screen and other children come to join the fun. Uniformly, the informants commented on the "flat" execution, though their reactions were rather evenly split between positive and negative evaluations.

I think it's really cute how they pop out and I like it when he's all flat, like someone in a picture. Then when they have the sodalicious they turn to regular people. It's kind of cute and I don't know how they do it. {205, F}

I didn't like it when he just like walked to a machine because I don't know any machines that give fruit snacks. I don't like that. You can't just be flat and then just turn round. {209, M}

Interest in the executional dimensions of this advertisement was apparent in all the interviews in which the commercial was shown. However, attention to the ad's creative strategy was more pronounced in the ad only exposure context. Without a tangible product to consider, both the ad and the promise it offers were salient considerations. Perceptions of the brand's flavor, texture, its likeness to real soft drinks and similarity to other fruit snacks were focal considerations in all interviews.

The shift from a more narrow product-oriented perspective to a more inclusive view of the ad and its contents may derive in part from the interview method. By utilizing a real advertisement, the children were exposed to all the creativity and excitement of the commercial in the context of the interview. An engaging execution may capture the child's attention and reinforce the brand's appeal in a viewing context. However, the salience of the product overwhelms any interest in the executional dimensions when children recount ads drawn from the domain of their own experience. Although an ad may entertain or amuse while conveying relevant brand information, these executional elements fade into the background relative to the more highly valued product-oriented message elements. By drawing upon both children's personal experiences with ads and products as well as their reactions to concrete stimuli, this approach to interviewing helps to sort out more completely how and what they think about advertised messages. Where children's everyday experiences are of concern, the product message is the key. Advertisements are of interest to the extent that they speak

to children's consumption wants and needs. What is readily brought to mind later, outside the viewing context, is the product and the potential for enjoyment it offers.

At some level, it is reassuring to find that the younger children are not quite as humorless as they appeared to be in discussing their personal experiences with specific ads and products. The lack of attention to the executional dimensions of these ads was striking in the initial phases of the coding process. Comments about whether specific ads were fun to watch or not, funny, or stupid were rare, except in an exposure context. These issues were simply not of great significance relative to the intrigue inherent in the product. Both the interview data and prior research would suggest that children of this age group frequently request products they see advertised (Galst and White 1976; Rossiter 1979; Isler et al. 1987; Ward and Wackman 1972). The younger children seemed to believe that there was at least a reasonable possibility that they would actually obtain these products. Given this presumption, it is not surprising that they concentrate on the product and the benefits it offers in thinking about advertisements. Fundamentally, it is the relevance of the advertised product to the children's lives that is of consequence and value. Among the younger children, all else is secondary.

A very different perspective is offered by the older children. More experienced, and perhaps more cynical than their younger counterparts, this group appears to approach advertising from the perspective of an art critic. Advertising is viewed principally as an art form and enjoyed or disregarded, quite apart from the benefits the product might offer. It is not the brand or its acquisition that is foremost in their minds. Instead, it is the entertainment provided by an ad, its novelty, or drama that captures the attention

and interest of the older child. Although the preliminary study identified the prominent role entertainment plays in the judgments of the older children, this characterization belies a more complex perspective. It is not simply the entertainment value of an ad that piques their interest but the creative strategy the advertiser employs. The older children view the advertisement as a strategic communication as well as a potential source of information and amusement.

I watch most of the commercials that come on (laughs). I watch them for stuff that they do that make people get attention. If they flashed different things, or if they just stayed on the same theme the whole way through the commercial. Like, well in the Pepsi commercial, it says it's got two words "Gotta Have It". That's three words and it makes people think about it. "Gotta Have It." So, stuff like that makes you think about it or remember it. Like something stupid that will make you think about how dumb that commercial was, and that makes you think about it. {503, F}

Among this group, there was substantial interest not only in the end product of the creative process, but in the way the advertisement was constructed and why particular creative techniques were utilized. For example, a musical execution might at one level be enjoyed for its own sake, and, at another, recognized as an effective approach for gaining consumers' attention.

Advertisements do serve as a rich source of entertainment. Readily brought to mind are advertisements that are perceived to be funny, ridiculous, stupid or exciting, irrespective of the specific product they promote.

I thought it was neat because, if I got a video camera and tried to make a commercial, I probably couldn't make it that good. The Honey Comb commercial has never left my head because its got all those details in it. Its got bright colors, and music, and kids with interesting things in it. That's what makes it stay in my head. I don't like that kind of cereal or the new kinds. I don't like sweet cereal. I just like the commercials though. {507, F}

Whereas the younger children focused on products they consume in thinking about ads, personal consumption had little to do with the opinions and ideas the older children offered. They were as likely to draw upon advertisements for Stainmaster Carpet, Huggies or Chicken Tonight, as Pepsi or Cheerios. Children's judgments of what constitutes an entertaining ad are relatively complex and sophisticated. Connoisseurs of technically advanced video images from television, movies, computers and games, these children have high expectations for commercial content. They particularly appreciate novelty in advertisements, whether represented by a new idea or the result of special effects. Their knowledge of advertisements is vast, having been exposed to thousands of commercials by the time they reach fifth grade. As a consequence, they can be harsh critics of advertising executions that represent nothing new or exciting. Ads which are perceived to be unusual are valued for their creativity and effort.

This was a really strange ad because I mean people were flat and they were walking around. At first it will really catch my attention, but then after a while it won't. It's a good starting but it's just not really full of surprises. Just the beginning was surprising. The rest of it, you probably knew what was going to happen. After he puffs up, the guy, it gets kind of dull for me. Because you know the other people will just pop up too. But the beginning was catchy. {505, M}

The shift from a product focus to a more entertainment-oriented perspective of advertising seems to derive both from older children's greater cognitive sophistication as well as their increased experience with ads, products and parent negotiation. Until children are approximately ten to eleven years-old, they tend to be rather literal in their interpretive strategies (Young 1990). Younger children read ads as a series of incidents and facts, tending to focus on the perceptual features of the message. While they are

aware of advertising's selling intent, recognition seems to have little direct bearing on how they interpret or evaluate ad contents. The literal character of younger children's comprehension may account, in part, for their more pragmatic perspective to advertising reception. The older children, on the other hand, are better able to appreciate the symbolic nature of advertised messages. While they readily acknowledge that advertisements are designed to sell products, it is the cinematic techniques, hyperbole and metaphor used to promote them that are of primary interest. No longer drawn primarily to the perceptual features within an ad, they begin to distance themselves from the immediate message and think about in a more reflective fashion (Ward, et al. 1977; Young 1990). This shift in children's interpretive strategies was clearly evident in the perspective the older group adopted. Armed with a greater understanding of advertising's techniques and character, the older child has the capacity to treat these communications almost as an art form. Part of the fascination is applying these new-found interpretive powers to the decoding of specific message elements and aims. Unless these communications are innovative, touching, exciting or funny, they are judged severely.

I don't have any other way to say this, it's stupid. It's unreal. It's like in this day and age, you know we have all these neat computer graphics. We have neat ideas, you know. Some of the shows I watch and some of the commercials are really creative and inventive. It's a way of advertising something while catching the reader's eye or the viewer's eye. But this, this was just stupid, a bunch of kids just standing around eating fruit snacks. It's like big deal! {511, M}

With years of exposure to these ads, children are bored by much of what they see. What is often characterized as growing skepticism of advertising, may be equally reflective of boredom with particular ad forms and content. At least among this group,

disappointment with heavily promoted products was rare. Frustration with ads that were perceived to be highly repetitive and boring was not. Like one might expect from an art critic, both positive and negative examples were readily generated. In either case, it is the ad execution that serves as the primary basis for judgment, not interest in the product itself. While metaphoric, the "art critic" label captures the orientation of the older children on multiple dimensions. Not only does it suggest that this group tends to approach commercials primarily as an art form but it also implies a certain level of detachment. Although the younger children adopted the role of consumer in thinking about ads and products, this was not the case among the fifth graders. Like professional critics, they seemed to distance themselves from the message. Reasoned opinions as to the value and truth of the work of art were common, quite apart from any personal interest in product acquisition or consumption.

I'm old enough and a lot of other people are old enough to understand life, you know. That's just the way of expressing something. Life isn't flat without them, you know. You could probably never taste one of these in your life and you'll be fine. But little kids who love these things and consume them by the tons wouldn't understand it, because they take things more literally than we do. They don't understand figures of speech, you know, little quips like that. {511, M}

The product seems to take on diminished importance among the older children as a consequence of both conceptual and pragmatic considerations. By the time they reach the fifth grade, these children have extensive experience with the brands that are marketed to children. They are knowledgeable about the brands available and the differences among them. Older children understand that advertising and packaging are designed to highlight product differences where few exist. The concept of parity products is a familiar one, though they would certainly not recognize the term. They

readily cite examples of cereals that are identical with the exception of the shape that changes as a function of its movie tie-in. They understand that premiums have a strategic purpose and that these incentives are an effective means of attracting the attention of their younger brothers and sisters. Although almost embarrassed to admit it, they can easily recall recent purchase decisions where they chose the brand with the premium offer or tie-in, over their preferred brands. They recognize that advertising and promotion help to create distinctions among otherwise functionally equivalent products. Armed with this emerging understanding of product offerings and marketing strategy, the older children have learned to temper their expectations about new brands and products. They are a little more tentative in their expectations, not necessarily as a consequence of overt skepticism but an awareness that few substantial differences exist within these product categories. Although these children consume these products and enjoy them, they may not hold the same excitement or sense of promise they once did. Relative to the creative elements within an ad, the brand information does not garner the same level of attention, perhaps accounting in part for the more detached perspective observed among the older children.

The ease of acquiring these types of products may also play an important role in shaping children's view of ad-product relations. Among the older children, there were much more well-established patterns for negotiating the purchase of particular brands within the family. Although the younger children seemed to feel that they were largely at the mercy of their parents' decisions, the older children felt that they had greater freedom to choose the kinds of snacks, cereals and lunchtime items they wanted. With

greater freedom of choice, these kinds of products are readily available, frequently consumed and taken for granted. Given their status in children's lives, it is not surprising that advertised claims for these products are processed only superficially. On the other hand, peers were often mentioned as sources of related product ideas, primarily as a consequence of incidental exposure at lunchtime or after school. With a wider range of salient sources of product information available, the importance of any one diminishes. The shift away from a product-orientation was evident among the fifth graders irrespective of the particular ad and product exposure situation within the interview.

The interdependence of ads and brands. At the outset of this research, it was anticipated that children's perceptions of the links between advertisements and their own product experiences would be strong and direct. When given the opportunity, it was expected that children would spontaneously compare their reactions to a brand with the advertisement designed to promote it. However, the findings of the initial study suggested that, at least older children, construe this relation in very loose, relaxed terms. The categories used to describe their reactions to advertisements were very different than those used to characterize the usage experience. While the children talked at length about what they perceived to be clever or intriguing about a commercial, they had less to say about the brand's specific attributes or benefits. Their reactions to the usage experience, conversely, were consumed by sensory characteristics such as taste, texture and appearance. Given the diffuse links between an ad and perceptions of performance apparent in the initial study, and the potential implications of these findings for understanding how advertising persuades, these findings were subjected to more stringent

examination in this study. Inclusion of the ad-product stimuli in the first phase of the interview allows for a direct assessment of children's spontaneous reactions when both advertisement and brand are present. If these attribute based comparisons are rare in this circumstance, it is unlikely that they are generated in a more naturalistic setting where ad exposure and consumption are separated in time.

Age-related patterns were observed in how closely related children perceive ads and brands to be. Consistent with the functional view of advertising reception, younger children perceive strong, direct links between advertisements and products. If they like the product, then they like the advertisement. Conversely, if the promoted brand is perceived to be unappealing then the advertisement is judged negatively as well. Their view is very practical and goal-driven. Advertisements are judged first on the basis of the brand they promote. Judgment of the brand rests on both its intrinsic appeal as well as the perceived likelihood that parents would be willing to buy it. The younger children frequently cited examples of advertisements that they didn't like because their parents were unwilling to buy the heavily sweetened snack or cereal depicted. The parent's role as gatekeeper was a salient consideration, weighing heavily in their specification of likes and dislikes. Without confidence in their ability to obtain the product, there is little reason to feel positively about the brand or the ad designed to promote it.

I don't like that one because it made me too hungry. Cookies are my favorite.
And we're not allowed to have snacks. {203, F}

Since advertisements are judged largely in terms of the brand's inherent appeal, it is not surprising that the younger children's judgments were evaluatively consistent whether the brand or the ad was the immediate topic of conversation. Younger children tend to

assume that the product is as depicted in the advertisement. As a consequence, the commercial is trusted to provide the information needed to evaluate the brand. If the brand looks like something they would like to have then the ad is judged positively. In the first interview phase, there was little evidence that the younger children shifted their ad based impressions as a consequence of trial exposure. If they expected to (dis)like the brand, product trial simply confirmed their expectations. There was also little indication of attitude change when product trial preceded ad exposure. This almost exclusive focus on the brand irrespective of the exposure context may help to explain the experimental findings. If the young child judges the advertisement simply on the basis of whether they like root beer fruit snacks or not, then it is not surprising that their ad-based and trial-based judgments are quite similar. It seems as though all but the brand's inherent appeal is screened out. Unless the product experience is clearly discrepant from ad claims, there is little reason for a shift to occur. The perceived links between the ad and brand are simple and direct. However, if the advertisement is judged on a more complex set of dimensions of which brand appeal is but one, then these linkages are not quite so straightforward.

Older children tended to view ads and brands more independently, and consequently were more flexible in their judgments. No longer tied exclusively to the brand's specific features, their impressions also incorporated assessments of the ad's interest value, and the accuracy of its portrayal. Links to the brand were considered not only as a consumer might, but as a dispassionate observer of the communication might as well. It is not simply what the ad says about the brand but how it is said that defines

the link between the message and the product. It is not that these children fail to appreciate the linkages between a product and the advertisement designed to promote it, as implied in the initial study. Rather, this study helps to highlight the multidimensionality of this relation. The intrinsic appeal of the product plays a secondary role relative to the creative and strategic properties of the advertisement. Judgments about the link between the ad and the brand focus more extensively on how well the ad communicates the brand's appeal and whether the approach taken is appropriate or not. This orientation may create a greater openness to the commercial message than typically recognized. This sensitivity was particularly apparent in children's responses to the advertisement and brand stimuli used within the first phase of the interviews.

If you leave soda out too long, the fizz in it gets flat and then it doesn't taste very good. I think they said it. If you eat it, you're not flat or something. They're probably talking about sodalicious tastes like real coke, like real sodas and stuff. And it doesn't taste like the normal fruit snacks that are supposedly flat in the commercial. {504, F}

Relative to their younger counterparts, the older children were much more flexible in their judgments about the brand. By incorporating both creative and performance-related distinctions in their thinking, the older children seemed to allow the ad greater latitude in shaping their perceptions of trial experience. Although the younger children were unlikely to shift their impressions as a consequence of advertising exposure, this was not the case among the older group. Those that saw the advertisement factored what they saw and heard into their overall impressions. The older children were more likely to adapt their initial perceptions because they were actively trying to integrate the two sources. While the younger children seemed to judge the ad solely in terms of the brand,

the older children applied multiple criteria in trying to find the linkages between the more elusive or whimsical ad message and the sensory-laden trial experience.

Fairly elaborate judgments were made about the quality of specific advertisements often with little mention of specific aspects of performance, except as a means of diagnosing the truth value of the ad. These children were careful to tease apart what aspects of an advertisement were literally true, which reflected exaggeration or fantasy and more rarely, which represented outright falsehoods. While obviously this evaluative process focuses directly on product performance, rarely did the children view the issue of truth in advertising in terms of its personal consequences. Instead, the perceived accuracy of performance claims was factored into their judgments of the overall quality of the commercial message. Their comments often reflected the analytical stance of a dispassionate observer rather than a potential consumer of these products.

Although the older children would readily point out the merits or weaknesses of an advertisement, irrespective of what they thought about the brand, this was extremely rare among the younger group. These patterns were particularly apparent in the first phase of the interview in which the ad-brand stimuli were utilized. While the older children might hold their attitudes about the brand in abeyance as they commented on the quality of the ad, this was not the case among the younger children.

Judgments of fantasy and reality. Evident in children's comments and critiques, is a particular attentiveness to the fantasy in commercial messages. In a fairly systematic fashion, the children separated what they perceived to be real, and not, in advertised portrayals. Distinctions between fantasy and reality were a central focus of attention

across interviews, age groups and advertisements. These were not directed comparisons but spontaneous attempts to tease apart fantasy and reality in the context of specific messages. These distinctions are not without consequence. They seem to underpin children's overall reactions to ad contents and serve as a tool to facilitate message comprehension. The centrality of the fantasy versus reality dimension in children's reactions to advertisements was also quite apparent in the initial qualitative study. This study extends these findings by examining the relevance of this dimension in the context of younger children's thoughts and reactions to advertisements. It also provides the opportunity to examine the role judgments of fantasy and reality play in children's overall perceptions of ad-consumption relations.

Distinctions between fantasy and reality are constructed by the children as a means of facilitating their own understanding of the message and what it intends. By separating what is real from what is not, they seem to equip themselves with what they need to reach an evaluative conclusion about an advertisement and the product it depicts. Given that children of this age group are actively trying to make sense of this entity called advertising, the centrality of fantasy-related distinctions is not surprising. In the child's life world, the concept of "pretend" versus "real" is readily understood and utilized to order play, as well as interpretations of others' behavior and events. What is interesting in the context of advertising reception, is how children draw on this understanding to evaluate particular message claims.

Although distinctions between fantasy and reality seemed to consume the attention of both age groups, the bases for these distinctions were not identical across younger and

older children. While the younger children readily recognize fantasy in advertisements, the basis for their judgments rests primarily on issues of physical possibility or impossibility, outward appearance and format. This is consistent with prior research which suggests that younger children's judgments are more closely tied to the perceptual features of media content (Kelley 1981; Young 1990). Older children, on the other hand, are more sensitive to the inner content of a message. Judgments about fantasy and reality no longer rest exclusively on aspects of physical reality but incorporate social and psychological dimensions as well. Their perceptions of what constitutes reality, like an adult's, become increasingly complex as plausibility enters the judgment equation. Children of this age group retain the capacity to look beyond a message's literal meaning to its figurative properties as well. While these interpretive differences are readily acknowledged in developmental investigations of children's processing of television and print media, researchers have been slower to consider how these changes might impact children's reception of advertised content (see Young 1990 for an exception). Evidence for these age-related patterns was quite apparent in children's reactions to the broad range of advertisements the respondents brought to mind within the interviews. While younger children's comments were largely confined to the realm of physical possibility or impossibility, the older children seemed to apply a much broader, more-inclusive perspective in separating fantasy from reality in commercials. Rather than casting reality in absolute terms, their judgments seemed to incorporate the realm of possibility where depictions might be literally false yet true at a higher plane where motives, intent and social conventions apply.

Age-related differences were quite apparent in children's reactions to the fruit snack advertisements utilized in the first phase of the interviews. Virtually all of the respondents, irrespective of age group, were attentive to the fanciful aspects of the fruit snack commercial. Whether they liked the ad or not, the younger children looked at the events depicted in the ad in literal terms. They concentrated on the fact that the commercial was not real, because it is impossible for anyone to be flat.

It's like a fairy tale on the commercial. I mean, people can't really be thin. And they can't just pop out of it like that. That's not real. {212, M}

That the "flat execution" might have some higher-level connotation was not reflected in their spontaneous impressions and reactions. They didn't seem to construct figurative meanings and had difficulty responding to questions which directed them to do so. Issues of fantasy and reality, truth and falsehood were judged in absolute terms, and on the basis of literal reality.

The older children, on the other hand, seemed to play with the meaning of the "flat execution." Not only did they recognize its metaphoric dimensions, but spontaneously constructed interpretations of its likely meaning. For example, they suggested that the execution was intended to convey (1) that the product makes kids feel better when they are sad, unhappy or "down", (2) that the two to three dimensional transformation suggests that the snack is like a soft drink and it fills kids up, (4) that without soda flavors regular fruit snacks are boring like flat soda, (4) that sodalicious creates excitement in kids' lives and (6) that by consuming this brand you could increase your popularity and standing among peers.

There were other people eating it because he did, sort of like he was popular. He ate it and then all these other people ate it. It's like a lot of people would do that. One person will buy something and eat it. And then the other people, if he's popular they'll go and get it too. It happens in real life, a little bit. {501, M}

In constructing these more figurative meanings, the older children seem to search out the linkages that make the execution true at some level. The older children appreciate that figuratively speaking there is some level of reality and truth in the fantasy laden images of the ad. They recognize that there are differing levels of truth and meaning in advertising. They understand that when cats dance or flat children magically return to three dimensional form in an advertisement, these events are not meant to be taken literally. Older children know that fantasy is utilized to convey an underlying idea or message. As a consequence, they look to these implicit meanings in making sense of the advertisement and its relationship to the product.

What makes this particularly interesting, is that the children seemed to draw on these higher levels of meaning in characterizing their trial experiences. For example, some of the respondents interpreted the flat execution to mean that the brand can make you feel better when you are unhappy or having a difficult time. After trying the brand, they interpreted their response in terms of this implicit claim, suggesting that the brand did make them feel good. Given the generality of such a claim, it becomes very easy to find a certain kind of reality within the ad.

They were trying to say that sodalicious will give you energy. And it will, because it's sugary. It's covered in like this sugar stuff, has like sugar sprinkled on it. They're trying to say that you'll be better after you try sodalicious. [] After he tried the sodalicious, he popped out and just got a lot of energy. It didn't happen to me. I mean I did feel good but I was still the same after I tried it. It tasted good, I liked it. {513, F}

While not literally true, there is a level at which the advertisement is perceived as both accurate and truthful. The issue of fantasy and reality is not cut and dried. Truth or reality becomes a matter of degree rather than an absolute distinction. As a consequence, it appears that it is the older child who appreciates these more elusive, symbolic meanings who is more susceptible to advertising's influence within a consumption context. Younger children who fail to appreciate non-literal meanings remain unaffected by these more abstract, relatively difficult to dispute claims.

Advertising as a communications genre. When children think about the relations between advertisements and products one of the primary issues that seems to consume their attention is the underlying meaning and purpose of the communications genre. By the time (s)he is 7 or 8 years-old, the typical American child has been exposed to thousands of television commercials. These communications differ markedly from television programs, stories, letters and other forms of communications children encounter. Among the older children, in particular, there is a real curiosity about advertising's unique character and strategies. Ads represent puzzles to be solved. Keenly aware of advertising's persuasive purpose, the older children often look beyond the message to the rationale behind it. Why a brand name is repeated frequently, or the reason behind the inclusion of a jingle is sometimes more interesting than the message.

They show the shape of the cereal a lot of times. When they show the box a lot of times, they show the name a lot of times. Make sure you remember it. Or sometimes they have a song, and it's like when you get songs in your head and you can't get them out. Like sometimes I'll do that. Like the other day, I had that Target song in my head. I couldn't get it out of my head. When I think of the song, I think of that logo with the target, and that makes you remember.
{513, F}

What makes this interesting is that these emerging expectations about what advertising is and how it works guide their interpretation of specific messages, perhaps creating a greater openness to persuasive messages than previously thought.

The younger children in this study clearly recognized advertising's selling intent. However, the implications of this fact were rarely considered. They know that advertisements are created to sell products but that does not necessarily alter their perceptions of heavily-promoted products or imply that commercials are viewed with distrust. The fact that commercials are designed to sell products is taken at face value. With few exceptions, the younger children did not seem to realize that advertising's role as a selling tool demands a particular mode of communication in which product claims are uniformly positive and exaggeration is common. From the child's perspective, ads do try to sell products. However, that is not necessarily linked to the message construction process because the distinction between product information and persuasive communications is not yet fully operative.

Older children, on the other hand, draw on their understanding of advertising to consider how particular messages are created and what they mean. They recognize that there are varying levels of truth in advertisements and have come to expect exaggeration and puffery. Unlike adults, however, they do not necessarily discount puffery as empty sales talk. Instead, it may be interpreted as a vague yet plausible promise of performance. Although the children readily acknowledge exaggeration, they may still allow it to influence their overall impressions. In essence, the advertisement is sufficiently ambiguous to contain some level of truth which the older children easily

recognize. Within the domain of children's advertising, it is the message rather than the consumption experience that is ambiguous and difficult to dispute directly.

Cognizant of advertising's selling intent, the older children recognize that exaggeration is a necessary ingredient in effective advertising. Rather than looking at advertising purely from the consumer's perspective, they begin to consider the manufacturer's point-of-view as well. Their orientation is relatively complex, incorporating multiple perspectives or vantage points. Given that manufacturers are attempting to sell products, they are allowed a certain latitude in presenting them in a favorable light. Older children recognize that ads are supposed to contain fictional elements, so they permit manufacturers certain freedoms. Although the younger children might equate exaggeration and falsehood, the older children are not so inclined. What the younger children view as patently false, the older children do not. Rather exaggeration is simply a part of the genre, to be expected and accepted. Unless the advertiser grossly oversteps the line between exaggeration and deliberate deception, they are relatively lax in their judgments.

Surprisingly, the older children recognize that advertising serves an important function for a business firm. They understand that it generates awareness among consumers and that without it, sales suffer. Sales and profit objectives are recognized but not fully understood. Not surprisingly, the children did not make the connection that long-term success ultimately rests on consumer satisfaction and repurchase. So, while they understand that advertising has a strategic purpose, this purpose is conceived of in terms of a firm's immediate needs. As a result, they believe that advertisers will go to

great perhaps ridiculous lengths to promote their products because the concept of long-term consequences does not enter into their thinking. This is interesting because this perception underpins how they think about what advertisers' motives and actions.

Older children recognize that people are employed by product manufacturers, and that without profitable brands business firms lose money and people lose their jobs. This awareness seems to create something of an ethical dilemma for the children. By being able to take the manufacturer's point-of-view, they recognize the value of advertising yet simultaneously feel that the consumer should not be confused or misled. As a consequence, they seem to develop rules or standards for advertisers that are seemingly inconsistent. For example, one of the respondents related an experience she had had with an arts and crafts kit that did not perform as expected.

Have you seen "Make it, Take it?" You put little beads into a frame and then you melt it in the oven. Well, I mean they show it so easily on the commercial. Just pour a little bit in and then you put it in the oven and in 10 seconds it's done. But they are like tiny beads and you have to put each individual one into everything. And it usually flows over and gets into your frame. It's not that easy, as they're trying to make it look like! If I'm buying something like that, I don't like when they do that. But sometimes if it's a real flop of a product they have to do that to protect their product.

Like the art project, I mean if it turns out to be a major flop, then you shouldn't show on the commercial how it's done. You should just show the product. You shouldn't show them that it could be done perfect. And then when you get it and you're not an expert at it, it doesn't come out perfect. But I think if you said something, it would be okay. As long as you didn't say, "our's is the best."
{503, F}

Although she felt disappointment, she continued to support the manufacturer's right to advertise. Though she clearly believed on the basis of her experience that it was a bad product, she also felt that the advertiser should continue to promote it as long as they

stopped short of stating their product outperformed others. Clearly, she was trying, however fitfully, to balance the rights of consumers and manufacturers. This was not an unusual stance for the fifth graders. The older children were quick to recognize the existence of conflicting goals, not only between advertisers and consumers, but also between parents and children. Each party is perceived as having different motives and points-of-views.

It is interesting that the fifth graders were generally hesitant to attribute deliberate wrongdoing to advertisers. Instead, they generally characterized problems they perceived as innocent mistakes or oversights. This pattern also held true among the younger children. Fifth graders were, however, sensitive to what they called "put downs" in advertising. They were very uncomfortable with claims that they perceived to be unfair either to competitors or consumers. When advertisers claim their brands are superior, this may be perceived not as mere puffery, but as an implicit criticism of other equally attractive brands. This seems to engender almost a sense of moral outrage. The respondents were strong advocates of the principle that everyone has a right to their own opinions. As a consequence, advertisers that appear to foist their opinions on others are judged severely.

I would say sodalicious is a good fruit snack and you can buy it if you want to, but you don't have to. I saw a commercial that said that and they really sold well. They really sold a lot of products. The commercials that say like, "buy it or else" and stuff, the people say "well, I don't really want to buy it cause they're forcing me to buy it." But, if you don't force them, they might turn around and buy it. {507, F}

What results is a perspective on advertising that is both forgiving and principled. From

the perspective of the older children, advertisers have legitimate objectives, they are permitted a certain latitude in achieving them, but fairness to all is essential.

It was clear from the interviews that the children recognize not only that advertisements incorporate a selling motive but that this motive leads to the creation of a particular type of message. Fundamentally, advertising is a unique form of communications that draws on particular types of message elements to gain and maintain attention. The younger children seemed to appreciate that advertisers develop creative strategies but stopped short of articulating what shape these strategies might take. The older children, on the other hand, were aware of specific attention-getting techniques and strategies. They understood the increased appeal and credibility associated with celebrity endorsers. They knew that music, humor and fast action are utilized to attract attention and interest. They recognize the importance of brand name recognition and repetition in advertising. Cognitive concepts like attention and memory were frequently discussed, revealing at least a rudimentary understanding of the persuasion process. They readily identified relationships between these kinds of response variables and specific executional elements. With this understanding, they were able to apply a variety of disparate standards in thinking about the relationship between advertisements and product use. Creative, strategic, equity and value considerations were all factored into their interpretations and assessments.

Children's skepticism: real or imagined. One of the basic assumptions underpinning traditional research on children and advertising is that as children mature, they become increasingly skeptical of ad content (e.g., Bever et al. 1975; Robertson and

Rossiter 1974; Rossiter 1977; Ward et al. 1977). By the time they reach the age of 10 to 11, they are presumed to be openly critical of advertising and its creators. This skepticism results, at least, in some measure from disappointment with heavily promoted products (Robertson and Rossiter 1974). With the emergence of skepticism come cognitive and attitudinal defenses that serve to protect children from advertising's persuasive appeal. Consequently, as a child matures (s)he acquires a better understanding of advertising, becomes more skeptical of its content and is less likely to be persuaded by it. Traditional research perspectives thus implicitly presume a linear relationship between age and susceptibility to advertising's influence. Both the results of the experiment and the differential age-related perspectives apparent in this study, suggest that this may oversimplify actual patterns of receptivity to advertising, particularly in terms of its impact on children's perceptions and attitudes in a consumption context.

There is no question that older children are generally more skeptical of advertising than their younger counterparts. They are frustrated and angered by commercials that they perceive to be unfair or exploitative. They understand not only that advertisers present their products in the best possible light but know why that is so. Their skepticism does not seem to be based on negative prior experiences or concerns about obtaining bad products. Little evidence of disappointment with heavily promoted products was revealed in this study, among either age group. Rather, skepticism seems tied to the level of overstatement within specific advertisements. It is not that a particular product is bad, but that an advertisement steps over the line between

exaggeration and deception. Although they were very negative about advertisements that "lie", the respondents were very hesitant to use that term. Only in the case of blatant misrepresentation were they willing to apply it. This is not simply a semantic issue. The older children seemed to believe that there is a fine line between exaggeration and deception. Given their awareness and acceptance of advertisers' objectives they are willing to tolerate relatively high levels of exaggeration and puffery. However, their patience wanes when an advertiser not only overstates its case but does so in an annoying, predictable manner. Much of what researchers have classified as skepticism among this age group, may actually reflect frustration with advertisements that children perceive to be stupid, boring or ill-conceived. Although they are skeptical of advertisers who they believe to be unfair, their latitude of acceptance is relatively wide. However, when considerations of ad quality, entertainment value and interest are raised, their perspectives narrow considerably. What looks like skepticism is closely tied to the child's evaluation of the ad construction effort. It is not simply a question of truth however broadly defined, but the interest and excitement the ad itself generates.

Discussion

The preceding analysis has examined children's perceptions of the relationships between the ads and products that permeate their everyday lives. Two distinctive perspectives emerged, that clarify and enrich the findings of the first two studies. While age-related differences were indicated in the experimental findings, it was not altogether clear what the younger children's responses signified until reconsidered in light of the interview data. From the perspective of a young child, ads and products are highly

interdependent, with ads serving primarily as conduits of brand information. Given this orientation, the evident limited impact of commercial messages in trial settings makes a great deal of sense. One of the contributions of this study to the overall project is the insight it offers into the way younger children think about ads and products. Their point-of-view offers a fascinating counterpoint to the interpretations of the older children, whose approach to ad-consumption relations was not hypothesized at the outset of the research project. Working from theory-based expectations initially, children between the ages of 10 and 12 were expected to be quite skeptical of advertised claims and what they presumed to suggest about the product. It was anticipated that with the benefit of consumption experience children would carefully compare ad claims against performance as a means of justifying their negative attitudes. However, the initial interviews quickly put these ideas to rest, as the children were provided with the opportunity to tell their story. From that study, a tentative perspective emerged suggesting that advertising was perceived as entertainment and that the links between ads and product use are perceived in very loose terms. These findings served both as input into the design of this study and as a source of *a priori* conceptual themes. Among the older children, the concepts identified in the preliminary study were again evident in this more in-depth investigation. While entertainment remains a focal concept, it is embedded in children's broader perspective of advertising as a creative, cultural and corporate product. This perspective is illuminated through the contrast provided by the younger age group. Its consistencies across the two qualitative studies lend credibility to the interpretation. Children's responses in the experimental setting are also consistent with the interview data. While

the experimental approach has the power to detect subtle and perhaps difficult to articulate changes in children's assessments and beliefs, it is less suited to understanding how children spontaneously interpret their experiences with advertisements and products. Insight into the complexity and richness of children's everyday experience is the gift of qualitative inquiry. By triangulating across sources (informants), materials (ads), and methods (experimental and interpretive), this design has attempted to maximize the trustworthiness of the research while gaining a detailed understanding of the meanings of advertising and consumption experiences in children's lives.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Traditionally, researchers have adopted either experimental or survey methods to investigate advertising's impact on children's product preferences and behavior. This investigation departed from that tradition on both substantive and methodological grounds. Recognizing that products and their use are a focal point of consumer behavior, this series of studies attempted to learn about how children construe these experiences and the impact advertising might have in shaping their perceptions. Although the effects of advertising on children has been the topic of extensive study, researchers have rarely looked beyond the prepurchase context to the realm of purchase and consumption. Given the sheer volume of these experiences and the relative ease with which they are evaluated, it becomes easy to argue that product use represents the most valuable source of marketplace information to the emergent consumer. It is from the child's perspective that this research was initiated and conducted. Recognizing that children are not simply unfinished adults and that they have a unique perspective of the marketplace, an "emic" approach was adopted to capture their reactions and feelings. Though interpretive approaches have gained acceptance within consumer research, they have not yet been applied to understand children's consumer issues. Concerns about children's abilities to articulate their thoughts may have created some apprehension among researchers, but the willingness and skill evidenced by the children in studies one and three may help to

assuage these worries. While this approach may not be appropriate for research with very young children, it can be profitably employed with school-aged children who have gained some facility in expressing their thoughts and opinions. Qualitative inquiry offers insight into a neglected side of consumer behavior, the meanings children impose on their everyday encounters with ads and products. Evidence for the value of this approach was gathered as the project unfolded.

Emerging from the preliminary study was a view of children's advertising reception that had less to do with the communication of brand information than the entertainment provided. Given the almost exclusive focus by children's advertising researchers on children's cognition, this was not wholly expected. Rarely are the executional dimensions of advertisements expressly considered, either in terms of their persuasive influence or impact as an expression of cultural meaning. Preliminary evidence that this fascination with the creative side of advertising might not hold for the younger children was also indicated by the initial interviews. Discovery-oriented research helps to surface these kinds of unanticipated relations and grasp their meaning within the context of children's experience. Peshkin (1988) suggests that understanding complexity is the unique gift of qualitative inquiry. Rather than limiting investigation to a few carefully controlled variables, qualitative inquiry retains the complexity and nuance of human behavior. Coupled with more traditional experimental methods, the hybrid design offers a more comprehensive and trustworthy view of children's response than either method might accomplish alone. The findings of the preliminary study served

as input to the conceptual development and design of the experiment as well as a source of *a priori* themes for the second qualitative study.

When the initial respondents revealed that advertisements were judged in terms of their entertainment value, the experiment was reformulated to incorporate affective variables. Through a causal design, the impact of these variables could be isolated and tested, moving the initial qualitative insights beyond the idiosyncratic. With existing theory and the initial qualitative findings somewhat at odds, the experiment served a particularly important role in this project. The precision and rigor of an experimental design provide the opportunity to assess the validity of divergent perspectives. While theory would suggest that older children are rather skeptical and unlikely to allow advertising to color their perceptions of a brand experience, the initial study had suggested otherwise. Rather than drawing on ad contents primarily to develop expectations about the brand, the children were allowing their reactions to the ad itself affect what they came to believe about the brand even when given the opportunity to try the product. This pattern is consistent with the qualitative findings which had highlighted the salience of advertising's creative properties. Experimental controls allow a clear test of the relationships among ad affect, brand perceptions and attitudes needed to clarify discrepancies between theory and empirical observations. The pattern of relationships observed among the older children not only reveals a greater sensitivity to ad messages within a consumption context than theory would suggest, but significant differences between the reactions of the two age groups. On the basis of the experimental findings alone, these age-related patterns are difficult to interpret. Among the second graders,

the experimental findings were essentially null results. The only significant differences observed were between advertising and any cell incorporating trial exposure. So, while this group clearly made a distinction between commercial exposure and product trial, once trial was implicated further interpretation was problematic.

One of the most valuable benefits of the second qualitative study was its capacity to clarify and enrich the experimental findings. The depth interviews provide a rich database from which to understand how these two age groups differ in their approach to ad-product relations. While the experiment identified important distinctions, the inherent limitations of close-ended measures make further interpretation difficult. Qualitative study provides the opportunity to see what lies behind the scaled responses. When it was the older rather than the younger children who were most affected by commercial exposure in a consumption setting, it was the qualitative data that helped to understand what this observation means in the context of children's everyday experience. The utilitarian perspective adopted by the younger children in the qualitative investigation makes their apparent indifference to the advertisements in the experiment understandable. While advertisements may persuade a young audience, affecting product choice and parental requests, they have little enduring influence in a consumption setting. If advertisements are viewed primarily as a means of obtaining product information, then it is understandable that they hold little residual interest when the child has the product in hand. Similarly, advertising's influence on the brand-related responses of the older children makes sense given the lead role entertainment plays in their thinking, as manifested in both qualitative studies. Qualitative inquiry is rarely utilized as a means

of illuminating experimental findings, but this may be one of its greatest strengths (see McQuarrie and Mick 1992 for an exception).

Collectively, the three studies paint an interesting picture of children's perceptions of ad-product relationships. Perhaps most intriguing, are the age-related differences that were hinted at in the initial study and more fully evident in studies two and three. While these patterns make a great deal of sense upon reflection, they were not anticipated at the outset of the research. When respondents in the initial study seemed to view the brand as tangential to the more interesting creative message, my thoughts turned to the search for a new topic. The children weren't responding in the way a (cognitive) theory-driven children's advertising researcher would expect. Rather, they were responding as children, in the terms that were meaningful to them. When I stopped and listened, new ideas were suggested and insights unobtainable from any other source acquired.

While any single project can only begin to make sense of a complex issue such as how relationships between advertisements and consumption experiences are perceived and evaluated, these three studies have identified some important dimensions. That older children who presumably have the defenses in place to resist commercials actually shifted their evaluations of a trial experience when preceded by an ad, suggests that advertising's effects are not necessarily confined to the prepurchase stage of consumer decision making. Research which purports to assess advertising's impact on children needs to begin to consider the broader context in which products are also purchased and consumed. Presumptions about the relative immunity of older children to commercial messages may not hold when extended to the usage situation. Children's general

attitudes about advertising seem to have little to do with their situation-specific responses. These findings are particularly interesting when juxtaposed against the responses of the younger children. Rather than thinking about advertisements solely as a source of brand information, a much more complex and multi-faceted perspective was revealed. Emerging from the initial interviews were indications that older children read an ad at a number of levels, including but not limited to its entertainment value, its truth or links to reality, and its effectiveness as a sales vehicle. Considerations of the advertisers' needs and aims were evident, reflecting movement away from a singular or idiosyncratic point of view. Ads were rarely perceived to be false, truth being perceived more in continuous rather than dichotomous terms. The second qualitative study revealed similar thematic elements, enhancing the trustworthiness of the overall findings. Few of these elements were evident in the thoughts and opinions of the younger children. Their judgments were more absolute and their perspective exclusively the consumer's. Ads were judged primarily in terms of the brand promoted. As a consequence, ads and brands were perceived to be highly interdependent. If the product is perceived positively (or negatively), so is the advertisement. Truth in advertising, while not a focal issue, is perceived in absolute terms when it enters the younger child's judgment.

What is interesting in contrasting these two perspectives is that it is the older child who, simultaneously, can appreciate the message and its relation to the product on multiple levels, and yet be more sensitive to its suggestion in a consumption setting. Perhaps the more unidimensional brand focus of the younger children somehow desensitizes them to these more diffuse effects of advertising. There is a complexity

involved in integrating these disparate sources that the younger children may not fully appreciate. What these findings suggest is that the presumption that children advance along some linear continuum as they mature until they are protected from advertising's persuasive influence may be erroneous. Increased knowledge and skill may be accompanied by shifting interests and approaches for dealing with advertising. Cognitive factors alone are not sufficient to capture the complexity of children's response. Affective and motivational dimensions are operative as well. Evidence from this series of studies suggests that with greater experience and skill may come new ways of thinking about advertising and its relation to products that are both more flexible and complex. With this increased sophistication comes a greater susceptibility to advertising's influence within consumption settings. The ad may in effect direct how the experience should be interpreted. Affect generated in response to the ad may spill over onto the experience, affecting how the brand is subsequently perceived. This is consistent with the transformational concept of advertising (Aaker and Stayman 1992; Puto and Wells 1984; Wells 1986). What is interesting, however, is that it is among the more knowledgeable and presumably more skeptical children where these effects are apparent. This is not to say that ignorance is bliss, but clearly the assumption that children proceed in a linear fashion toward adult-like enlightenment bears reconsideration. By utilizing an inductive approach that is grounded in the meanings children perceive, misconceptions can be surfaced and further scrutinized.

While this series of studies illustrates some of the benefits of a hybrid research design, it also has its limitations. Clearly, it is limited by the substantive domain it

purports to represent. Whether the patterns that were observed would hold in other product categories or among children of other groups are empirical questions. While a broad range of products and advertisements were raised by the informants in the depth interviews, all stimuli used in the research were food products. The research is also limited in its ability to determine conclusively why the age-related differences that were evident occurred. Though these patterns were consistent across interpretive and positivist methods, the study was not designed to tease apart various causal explanations. For example, further research would be needed to ascertain whether a salience explanation or integration problem might better account for the second graders' lack of sensitivity to advertised claims in a trial context. Relatedly, the presence of stimulus interactions in the experiment also suggests that specific message factors may significantly influence how the ad is brought forward into the consumption setting. However, it is impossible to conclude with certainty what these message elements are on the basis of this research. Small sample sizes in the experiment also precluded within group tests of sufficient power to detect across cell differences, perhaps resulting in type II errors. This was the result in part of a very time intensive experimental protocol and the tradeoffs it required. Finally, whether the effects of advertising on consumption would hold in more naturalistic contexts in which there is a delay between exposure and use is a key empirical issue. This design may overstate advertising's effects by minimizing recall demands. Both experimental and interview methods might be used effectively to address these issues in more naturalistic settings.

From this foundation, there are a number of directions that future research might take. As a first step, it would be useful to explore the role entertainment plays in children's judgments of advertisements across both a wider age range and message types. Based on research evidence among adult populations, there appears to be a shift in how ad-trial interactions are evaluated that occurs at some point beyond age 11. Research which examines the nature and timing of this shift would be useful for gaining a more in-depth understanding of ad-trial interactions from childhood to adulthood. A second area that bears investigation is the development of better measures of transformational effects. This is particularly important in the realm of children's advertising response where so few measures of any kind currently exist. This lack of appropriate measures seems to have constrained this entire research area. Future research is also needed to develop a deeper understanding of children's consumption issues. Very little is known about children's consumer behavior except that which pertains to advertising effects. One direction that might be taken from this study is to begin to consider the shopping context and its relation to children's consumption as well. Children's involvement in the family shopping may represent an important consideration in their consumption patterns, beliefs and attitudes. Alternatively, consumption studies might be approached from the perspective of favored possessions and their meaning and role within children's lives. Irrespective of the specific direction taken, what this research does suggest is that the children's perspectives are unique, valid and worthy of investigation. Their culture is their own. As adults, we have long forgotten what it means to experience the world through the eyes of a child. However, if we listen, perhaps they'll tell us.

APPENDIX A

PRELIMINARY STUDY INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

Thank you for volunteering to talk with me today, I really appreciate it. Before we start, I would like to ask you if it is okay if I record our conversation so that I can go back to it later on. I will be talking to so many people that I might forget things, otherwise.

If it is okay with you, I am going to show you some television commercials and products and then ask you to tell me what you think about them. I'd like to know what you think of the commercials, what you think of the products, what you find interesting or not. It can be anything at all. I'm interested in everything you have to say.

The reason I'd like to know these things is because grownups don't know very much about what kids think about the products they see advertised on TV. People notice different things in a commercial, I would like to know just what you think.

Before we start, let me tell you that if there are any questions you don't want to answer that's okay. Or, if you want to stop, that's okay too. Do you have any questions?

Background Questions

1. Age, Birthday
2. Things like to do after school
3. Siblings

General Product Experience and Shopping InvolvementProducts

1. What kinds of things do you eat for breakfast?
2. Do you eat cereals? (Every day/some days)
3. What kinds of cereal do you like? dislike?
4. What is it that you like(dislike) about _____?
 - A. What makes _____ good? not so good?
 - B. What do you look for in a cereal?
5. How did you find about _____?
(ONLY IF AD MENTIONED)
 - A. Tell me about a commercial for_____.
 - B. What do you think a commercial for _____ should say or have in it?
6. What are the ways that you find about different kinds of cereals?
7. At your house, how do you decide what kinds to buy? Who chooses? How does that work?

Shopping

8. Do you go grocery shopping with your parents? How often?
9. Think about the last time you went to the grocery store. Can you tell me about it? What did you do? Where did you go in the store? What did you look at?
10. Do you like to go grocery shopping? What is it that you like/dislike about it?

Product Experience Questions

(After Product Trial)

1. What did you find out about _____ by trying it?
2. What do you think of _____ now that you've tried it.
3. What do you like about _____? dislike?
4. How is _____ compared to what you thought it would be like before you tried it? How is it the same? How is it different?
5. If you were going to tell a friend about _____, what would you say?
6. Is _____ like any other products you've tried? How?

(ONLY IF AD HAS BEEN MENTIONED)

7. When you eat _____ is it like the commercial? How is it the same? different?
8. What should a commercial for _____ tell kids about it?

Advertising Response Questions

(After Ad Exposure)

1. Tell me about the story in this commercial.
2. What did this commercial make you think of while you were watching it?
3. What does this commercial tell you about (brand name)?
 - A. What did you find out about ____ by watching this commercial?
 - B. Describe _____. What is _____ like?
 - C. What do you think about _____? What is _____ like?
 - D. Is there anything that you think the commercial should have told you about _____ but didn't?
4. Why did the advertiser show _____ to tell you about _____?
5. If you were going to tell a friend about this commercial, what would you say?
6. Do you like this commercial? What is it that you like? dislike?
7. Describe the kids (people) in the commercial. What are they like?
8. Suppose you were making your own commercial for _____. What would you want to put in it?
9. What do you think the people who made the commercial are trying to tell kids in this commercial? Or, what did the advertiser want you to think about?
10. What kind of a person is the advertiser trying to talk to with this commercial?

General Perceptions of Television and Advertising

1. Do you like to watch television? What are your favorite shows?
2. When you are watching television, do you watch the commercials?
3. What are some commercials that you remember?

(Discuss each ad individually; probe for comparisons/contrasts where possible)

- A. Tell me about (commercials mentioned).
 - B. Is that a commercial you like/dislike?
 - C. What is it about ____ that you like/dislike?
 - D. You said you liked the commercial for (brand name), how is that different than (the same as) the commercial for (brand name)?
4. What are commercials on TV for?

Revisions: 2/12, 2/20, 4/20

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE EXPERIMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Ss Number: _____ Sequence: _____ Date: _____

INTRODUCTION: "I'm talking to kids like you (in 2nd/5th grade) to find out what you think about the commercials and products that you see on TV. I don't work for the people that make these products and commercials, so it won't bother me if you say you don't like something. This isn't like school work- there are no right or wrong answers-- I just want to know what you think. To do this we are going to play some games.

PBA INSTRUCTIONS: "For the first game, I'm going to ask you how much you like different products by using this set of stamps. On these stamps are some faces-- let me tell what they mean. First, this one means you like the product real, real well, it's one of your very favorites. (point) Second, this one means you like it but it's not one of your favorites. (point) This face means you feel medium, you don't really like it but you don't really dislike it either. (Point) Here, you don't like the product but it's not really terrible either. (Point) And, this face means you don't like to eat it at all; it's really terrible."

Okay?, How much do you think you like ____? (For initial items, repeat rating and ask is that what you mean)

Same face 2X: By picking the same face for Brand X and Brand Y, that means you like them about the same. Is that what you think? You can pick a different face if you want to.

- | | | | | | |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 2. _____ | 3. _____ | 4. _____ | 5. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 7. _____ | 8. _____ | 9. _____ | 10. _____ | 11. _____ | 12. _____ |
| 13. _____ | 14. _____ | 15. _____ | 16. _____ | 17. _____ | 18. _____ |
| 19. _____ | 20. _____ | 21. _____ | 22. _____ | 23. _____ | 24. _____ |

Cognitive Responses

"Are you a good storyteller? Well....

Ad Only: Here is a picture of a boy and girl who are in (2nd/5th) grade, just like you. They just watched the commercial for brand name and now they are talking to each other about what they saw. Tell me a story about what you think they are saying? (Probe: That's great! Is there anything else you want to put in your story?)

Trial Only: Here is a picture of a boy and girl who are in (2nd/5th) grade, just like you. They just tried some brand name and now they are talking to each other about it. Tell me a story about what you think they are saying. (Probe: That's great! Is there anything else you want to put in your story?)

Combination Cells: Here are two pictures of a boy and a girl who are in 2nd/5th grade just like you. In this picture, the boy and girl just saw the commercial for ____ and now they are talking to each other about it. In this picture, they have just tried some of the ____ and they are talking to each other about it. Please pick one of these pictures and tell me a story about what you think the boy and girl are saying. (Probe: That's great! Do you want to put anything else in your story?)

2nd: Now, let's look at the other picture. How can that help you tell your story or add to it?

PC: CL SS Number: _____ Sequence: _____ Session: _____ Date: _____

Previous Exposure to Ad

1. Have you seen this commercial before (today)? YES NO NOT SURE
2. (If Yes) Have you seen it: a lot of times or just a few times? LOT FEW

Cognitive Responses (Choice: 1=Ad 2=Trial)

Attitude Toward the Ad

"Let's talk about the commercial that you just saw for _____.

1. How much did you like the commercial you just saw? (sticker)

5	4	3	2	1
LIKE A LOT	like some	like a little	don't like much	DON'T LIKE AT ALL

2. How did watching this commercial make you feel? (facial scale)

5	4	3	2	1
REAL HAPPY				REAL SAD

3. How exciting was this commercial to watch? (jumping scale)

5	4	3	2	1
VERY EXCITING				NOT AT ALL EXCITING

4. Would you say, this commercial is good or bad? (1st G/B/N)

5	4	3	2	1
REALLY GOOD	sort of good	not good nor bad	sort of bad	REALLY BAD

Ad Perceptions

Instructions: Now, I'm going to read you some sentences about the commercial you just saw and I want to know what you think. (Read #1) Tell me if your answer is yes or no. (Get yes/no) Do you really think ____ or sort of think ____? If you "really think" ____ give it a BIG (YES/NO), if you "sort of think" ____ then give it a little yes/no). Okay?

(After example, review all 5 options (including ? : "if you just can't decide")

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | The commercial was lots of fun to watch and listen to. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. | There were too many things going on in this commercial. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. | I liked the things the people did in this commercial. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. | The commercial was dull and boring. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. | It's the kind of commercial that keeps going through my mind after I've seen it. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. | I think this commercial is hard to understand. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. | I wish there were more commercials like this on TV. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. | I've seen this commercial so many times before-I'm tired of it. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. | I thought this commercial was really neat. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. | The story in the commercial was dumb. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11. | This commercial is better than most other commercials on TV. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. | I just laughed -- I thought the commercial was very funny. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

"Now, I'm going to ask you some questions about the cereal (in the commercial.....)"

Brand Familiarity

- Do you remember ever tasting _____ before (today)? YES NO NS
- (If Yes) How many times would you say you've eaten ____ ?
 1 2-4 5 = +

Brand Attitude

- "Let's use the yes/no cards again. (Read A)
Yes or No? Big Y/N or little y/n"

A. I like <u>Double Dip Crunch</u> .	YES	yes	?	no	NO
B. I think it is a good <u>cereal</u> .	YES	yes	?	no	NO
C. I'd tell my friends about it.	YES	yes	?	no	NO

- Star Scale Instructions: "I would like to know how many stars you think Double Dip Crunch Cereal should get."

Five stars means you think ____ is really great!.

Four " like _____, it's good but not great.

Three " think _____ is just so-so.

Two " don't like it, it's bad but not terrible.

One " don't like it at all, it's really terrible.

How many stars would you give Double Dip ?

5 4 3 2 1

- Ladder scale: "Here is a picture of a ladder. At the top of the ladder is the very, very best cereal you can think of. At the bottom of the ladder is the absolute worst cereal that you can think of. On which rung of the ladder would you put _____?"

Brand Perceptions

Instructions: "Now we are going to play a matching game. I am going to read some things (the commercial said) about _____. I'd like you to tell me how much you believe them. (what the commercial said.)

If you think something is very true, then you would pick this one, "I REALLY BELIEVE". If you think something is sort of true then pick this one, "I sort of believe". If you think something is not very true then choose this one "I don't really believe". Or, if you think something is not true at all, then choose this one "I don't believe at all". Okay?

Let's try one. 'the cereal is made with sugar'. Let's match this card to one of these four cards. Would you say (read options). That means you think (read back to child). Is that right? Great!

Remember, I want to know what you really think is true and not true about ____ -- not what (the commercial said/somebody else might say) about it.

Brand Perceptions: Cereal

1.	the cereal is crunchy.	4	3	2	1
2.	is made with honey.	4	3	2	1
3.	is dipped in two flavors.	4	3	2	1
4.	tastes sweet.	4	3	2	1
5.	has nuts in it.	4	3	2	1
6.	is part of a complete breakfast.	4	3	2	1
7.	has a great taste.	4	3	2	1

(4 = really believe, 1 = don't believe at all)

Belief Confidence

Instructions: "Now I am going to read you some sentences and I want you to tell me which one is true for you (read options). Let's try one. "You said that you think Double Dip Crunch is (isn't) crunchy, do you..."

1.	the cereal is crunchy.	4	3	2	1
2.	is made with honey.	4	3	2	1
3.	is dipped in two flavors.	4	3	2	1
4.	tastes sweet.	4	3	2	1
5.	has nuts in it.	4	3	2	1
6.	is part of a complete breakfast.	4	3	2	1
7.	has a great taste.	4	3	2	1

(4 = really, really think so, 1 = really just guessed)

Belief Evaluations

Instructions: Different kids like different things about food. I'm going to read you some things about cereal and you tell me how much you like these things. Ok? (show scale). Point to this picture if you really like something a lot, this one if you like it a little and this one if you don't like it at all. Ok?

"How much do you like cereal that is crunchy?"

1.	is crunchy.	3	2	1
2.	is made with honey.	3	2	1
3.	is dipped in two flavors.	3	2	1
4.	tastes sweet.	3	2	1
5.	has nuts in it.	3	2	1
6.	is part of a complete breakfast.	3	2	1
7.	has a great taste.	3	2	1

(3 = like a lot, 1 = don't like at all)

Satisfaction with Product Experience

1. Now that you've actually tried _____, which sentence is right for you?
Double Dip _____
- A. _____ was not as good a lot worse a little
B. _____ just the same
C. _____ or better than I thought it would be. a lot a little
2. When I watched the commercial, it made me think about asking my Mom to buy the cereal that was shown on TV.

YES yes ? no NO

Brand Attitude: (Filler Brands)

1. Star Scale Instructions: "I would like to know how many stars you think these other cereals should get."

Five stars means you think _____ is really great!.

Four " like _____, it's good but not great.

Three " think _____ is just so-so.

Two " don't like it, it's bad but not terrible.

One " don't like it at all, it's really terrible.

How many stars would you give _____ ?

1. _____	5	4	3	2	1
2. _____	5	4	3	2	1
3. _____	5	4	3	2	1
4. _____	5	4	3	2	1
5. _____	5	4	3	2	1

Attitudes toward Television Commercials (Session 4)

Instructions: "Now I'm going to read you some sentences and I want you to tell me if you think they are right or wrong. Let's try one. (Cartoons are fun to watch)"

- | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Television commercials tell the truth. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. | Most TV commercials are not nice and bother me. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. | Television commercials tell only the good things. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. | I like most television commercials. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. | Television commercials try to make people buy things they don't really need. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. | Most of the time you can believe what the people in commercials say or do. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. | The products they show the most on TV are usually the best products to buy. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. | Television commercials make things look better than they really are. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

APPENDIX C AD TEXTS

Pizzaria Chips

This is an animated advertisement containing three elf characters, two teenagers and one well-meaning but uncool adult. At the beginning of the message, one teenager is playing loud rock music on a guitar and the other is playing basketball up in their treehouse room. Over the din, the adult elf calls to them, requesting that they come down and try the new chips. They are reluctant but acquiesce. The boys then discover that the chips are great. They return to their music, singing the praises of the chips.

Adult Elf: "Hey Fellas, come on down and taste something new!"

1st Boy Elf: "Uh, right Uncle Ernie" (hesitates, then under his breath: "in your dreams")

(Boys Taste Chips)

Both Boys: "Pizza! Exotic Man, Chips! New Pizzarias!"

1st Boy Elf: "Crankin' with real pizza dough! Cheese! Spices!

Both Boys: "Radical Grub!"

2nd Boy Elf: "Tastes like real pizza!"

1st Boy Elf: "Only louder. Pizzarias Rule!"

Adult Elf: "Groovy chips, huh boys?"

Both Boys: "What did he say?"

Advertised Product Attributes Measured in Experimental Questionnaire

(S = Search; E = Experience; C = Credence Attributes)

1. Taste like real pizza (E)
2. Smell like pizza (E)
3. Chips are crunchy (E)
4. Made with real pizza dough (S)
5. Made with cheese (S)
6. Kids who are fun and like to have a good time eat them (C)

Soda.Licious Fruit Snacks

This advertisement is partially animated. At the outset, a boy is depicted in one dimensional form lackadaisically bouncing a flat basketball that drops and spins like a coin. Suddenly a soda.Licious fruit snack machine appears, they boy tries them and pops back to his former shape as soda bubbles cascade across the screen. Other "flat" children watch what happens, try the snacks and pop back to normal, jumping and laughing as they do. The exuberant group of children come together smiling and eating the fruit snacks. The camera then cuts to a picture of the package and a description of flavors available. Finally, the boy walks away smiling, as he bounces his basketball.

- Adult Announcer: (voiceover) "Feeling flat? Add some pop with new Soda.Licious. The soda pop fruit snacks with the tingly soda sensation!"
- Boy: (Tries snack and pops back to normal) "So!, Soda.Licious!"
- Kids: "Ooooooh!"
- Adult Announcer: "Soda.Licious Fruit Snacks in Soda.Licious soda flavors like cherry, cola and root beer. New Soda.Licious fruit snacks..."
- Boy: "Because life without it, is flat!"

Advertised Product Attributes Measured in Experimental Questionnaire

1. Tingle in your mouth when you eat them (E)
2. Taste like soda (E)
3. Make you feel better when you're flat or tired (E)
4. Are exciting to eat, they pop (E)
5. Delicious (E)
6. Made with real fruit (S)
7. Come in different flavors than other fruit snacks (S)

Double Dip Crunch Cereal

At the outset of this ad, cereal boxes are dancing as a tune plays in the background. Then, as the announcer begins to speak (as the music continues), split screens are shown one a shot of a beehive with puppetlike bees buzzing around it and the other with a girl watching the bees and smiling. The picture then shifts to steel nuts on the left and a boy on the right, looking a bit confused. The steel nuts are quickly replaced by a shot of squirrels gathering nuts and the boy smiles with satisfaction. The two ingredients honey and nuts are emphasized repeatedly through a series of quick shots showing the product, the ingredients and the two children happily eating the cereal. The ad concludes with a shot of the product package as the announcer reiterates "two dips, one great taste."

Adult Announcer: (voiceover) "New Kellogg's Double Dip Crunch cereal is dipped in two tasty flavors. Once in honey, Mmmmm, the sweet kind, made by bees. And then in nuts. Not these (pictures steel nuts), but these! Delicious honey and nuts, the best of both worlds. New Kellogg's Double Dip Crunch, two delicious dips, one great taste! And part of a complete breakfast. Two Dips. One Great Taste!

Advertised Product Attributes Measured in Experimental Questionnaire

1. Cereal is Crunchy (E)
2. Tastes Sweet (E)
3. Made with Honey (S)
4. Contains nuts (S)
5. Part of a complete breakfast (S)
6. Has a great taste (E)
7. Dipped in two flavors (S)

Smarties

This is a fast-action musical ad, that employs special effects. At the outset, children are on a city rooftop watching a blimp drop giant boxes of Smarties from the sky. As they parachute to the ground, the children run to open the giant boxes and happily eat the candies. A giant box is shown with candies streaming across the sky. Quick shots of the children eating the candy with delight are interspersed throughout. The Smarties then become a train that speeds through the city as the children look on and cheer. As the song ends, a Smarties package is shown with a giant candy on top.

Song: "When you eat your Smarties do you eat the reds one last? Do you suck them very slowly or crunch them very fast? Eat that candy coated chocolate. Now tell me when I ask, when you eat your Smarties do you eat the red ones last?"

When you eat your Smarties do you eat the red ones last? Do you suck them very slowly or crunch them very fast? Eat that candy coated chocolate. Now tell me when I ask, when you eat your Smarties do you eat the red ones last?
(Performed by an adult male with children joining in during the second verse)

Advertised Product Attributes Measured in Experimental Questionnaire

1. Made out of milk chocolate (S)
2. Crunchy (E)
3. Can make them last a long time by sucking them very slowly (E)
4. Come in different colors (S)
5. Many candies per box (S)
6. Supposed to eat the red one last (S)

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR STUDY 3

Introduction

Thank you for talking with me today. If it is okay with you, I am going to show you some television commercials and products and ask you to tell me what your opinions are or what you think about them. It can be anything at all..... The reason I'd like to know these things is to learn about what kids think about the products they see advertised on TV. People notice different things so I would like to know just what you think.

Before we start, is it okay if I record our conversation so that I can go back to it later on. I will be talking to so many people that I might forget some things, otherwise.

As we talk, if there are any questions you don't want to answer that's okay. Or, if you want to stop, that's okay too. Do you have any questions for me? If you think of some be sure to ask.

Background Questions

1. Age (Birthday), Siblings
2. Things like to do after school
3. TV Viewing

Everyday Experience QuestionsGeneral Perceptions of Advertising-Product Linkages

1. Ad-Driven Reactions

Let's talk about some commercials that you can remember.

- a. Tell me what happens in that commercial. (What is the story?)
- b. What is it about that commercial that makes you remember it?
- c. (Once any form of ad evaluation is offered) Is that a commercial that you like or dislike? What's in it that you like (dislike)?

2. Product-Driven Reactions

- a. What are some of your most favorite snacks (chips, cookies, fruit snacks-- stuff like that? least favorite?
- b. What is it that you really like (dislike) about _____?
What makes _____ good? not so good?
- c. How did you first find out about _____?
(if ad, pursue further-- e.g., What did you see?)

Stimulus Specific Questions

Product Experience Questions (After Trial)

1. What did you find out about _____ by trying it?
2. Now that you've tried _____, tell me in your words what its like.
3. What do you like about _____? dislike?
4. How is _____ compared to what you thought it would be before you tried it?
How is it different?
5. Is _____ like any other products you've tried? How?
6. What kind of people do you think would like _____?
7. If you wanted to make the "perfect" _____ what would you change about _____?
What would you keep the same?
 - a. If you wanted to let people know about your "perfect _____" what would be a good way to do that?
8. Have you ever heard of _____ before? Where? (If TV, probe for specifics on ads seen, If trial, extent of prior use)

Advertising Response Questions (After Viewing)

1. I'd like to know what you think of this commercial (pause). What did it make you think of while you were watching it?
2. What was the story in this commercial?

(Follow-up) What happened?, What did the people in the commercial do? say?
What else can you remember about what the people (characters) said or did?
3. Did you like or dislike this commercial? How much?
 - a. What's in it that you like (dislike)?
 - b. What makes it seem good (bad) to you?
4. What do you think they were trying to tell you about _____?

Ad x Product Trial Interaction

1. When you eat ____ is it (would it be) like the commercial? How is it the same? different?

If different:

- a. How did it happen that the commercial makes ____ look different than it is when you get it?
 - b. How are the commercial and the snack made? Where? By whom?
2. Do you think the commercial made (makes) the food look better or worse than it really is? How?
 3. What do you think commercials for ____ should tell kids about it? (What do you think kids would want to know before they try __?)
 4. Is there anything the commercial maybe should have said about ____ but didn't? (Is there anything that maybe would have been good to say in the commercial but they didn't?)

Everyday Experience QuestionsChoice Processes and Shopping Involvement

1. Let's talk about how your family decides what kinds of foods to get, okay? At your house, how do you decide what kinds of cereals/snacks/chips to buy? who chooses? How does that work? (or go back to favorite cereals/snacks mentioned earlier)
2. How often do you go grocery shopping with your Mom or Dad?
3. Do you like to go grocery shopping, or not? What is it that you like (dislike)?
4. Let's think about the last time you went to the grocery store. Can you tell me about it? Who was there? What did you do? Where did you go in the store? What did you look at?

General Ad-Product Experiences

1. Did you ever see something on TV that you got and then when you got it, it wasn't as good as you thought it would be? Tell me what happened.
2. Do you ask your Mom/Dad for things you see on TV. If yes, can you tell me about something you asked for?
3. We've talked a lot about TV commercials and stuff you like to eat. Who makes the commercials? Where do they come from? What about the snacks?

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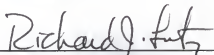
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Elizabeth Susan Moore-Shay was born on March 25, 1957, in Norwood Massachusetts. After graduating from Newtown High School, she attended Mount Holyoke College, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology, graduating magna cum laude in 1980. She then worked as a research assistant in the Department of Psychology at the University of Massachusetts and as a teacher in the Fryeburg, Maine, public schools. In September of 1981, she went to work for Carroll Reed Ski Shops as a forecast analyst and was promoted to director of sales planning and forecasting before leaving to return to graduate school in 1985. She enrolled at the University of Florida where she pursued degrees in both the College of Education and the College of Business Administration. In December 1989, she received a Master of Education degree. After completing her doctoral studies under the direction of Dr. Richard J. Lutz in the Department of Marketing, she will be a member of the business administration faculty at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. Elizabeth is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi Scientific Research Society. She was married in 1981 to Neil Frank Shay. Elizabeth and Neil have a daughter, Laura Jane, born in January 1988.

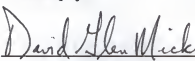
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This dissertation was submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Department of Marketing in the College of Business Administration and to the Graduate School and was accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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